University of Alberta

HAROLD ADAMS INNIS: THE BIAS OF HISTORY

by Michael Gordon Luski ©

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fufillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

Department of History & Classics

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1998

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Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

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DEDICATION

To Yvonne and our daughter Zoe. To my mother. To my father. To my sisters. Thank you for your support and thank you for your faith.

ABSTRACT

With the benefit of an economist's education at Chicago, Harold Adams Innis learned to see the social impact of technology. His study of Canadian natural resources, in conjunction with transportation systems, taught him to see empire as a pattern of flow. With his staples research programme exhausted, morally driven by issues of war and peace, and concerned by the social power of publishing, he followed newsprint into the marketplace of the big American newspaper. From there Innis investigated publishing technologies back to their origins in time. Conceptually and methodologically, Innis's inquiry into communications media was a parallel replication of the systematic historical method he employed to study staple economies. Harold Innis followed staples into communications where he came to recognize that, whether by the example of beaver pelts or by the example of advertising, he had always been studying the flow of media through empire and civilization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It has been my good fortune in life to have encountered many fine students of History, more than I can mention. I particularly wish to acknowledge the late Dr. Kenneth Melton Dodd of Lakehead University for his singular insight and wisdom and who, for me, truly opened the door to the fabulous treasure house which is the study of History. He embedded a hook so deep that many years later I was compelled to return to university to pick up this challenge. I wish to recognize the late Dr. John E. Foster of the University of Alberta for his support and for his ability to rekindle my enthusiasm in the early stages of my return when my faith was shaky. Also at Alberta, I wish to acknowledge Dr. R. Julian Martin for the creative response which his rigor and standards of excellence inspired and for his personal interest in my programme. I wish to acknowledge Dr. Douglas R. Owram who, as my thesis advisor, gave me the opportunity to undertake this challenge in my own way. I know that his careful eye for the flow of historical narrative has substantially improved the construction of this work. Finally I wish to thank Yvonne H. M. Rezek, MLIS, who edited my work through innumerable drafts. All errors remain my own. As Samuel Eliot Morison said in a very different context, "History is like that, very chancy."

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INTRODUCTION

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

T. S. Elliot
Burnt Norton

It may say something about the life of an academic in Canada that Harold Adams Innis, who in his time was internationally recognized as a great scholar, has all but disappeared from the public imagination. Posterity has proven fickle for a man who shone brightly in the second quarter of this century. While it may be wishful to anticipate a popular revival of his work, certain of Innis's later ideas have attracted a sustained interest among communications scholars. This is not surprising, as a body of his writings address a core issue of our times — the revolutionary capabilities of new media technology. Harold Innis argued a provocative thesis that revolutionary changes in media create revolutionary changes in ideas, power, economies, culture, and in short, civilization, itself.

Harold Innis has developed a reputation for an impenetrable style of expression as well as the elusive nature of his thinking. Yet during his career, he developed two concepts which had a founding influence in two distinct fields of scholarship; the first, in Canadian economic history, and the second, in communications studies. This first concept, the staples thesis, was celebrated in its time as a powerful new explanation of how economic forces molded the historical development of Canada in a particular manner. Innis's elevation to the heights of academic leadership in Canada and the English speaking world was a demonstrated recognition of his intellectual influence. Innis's other fundamental idea was the revolutionary role that new media technology played in the dynamics of the historical process. His study of communications was greeted with perplexity by his peers who, for the most part, found this work to be an unintelligible departure from Canadian history. His media ideas had little currency in his lifetime and seemed to die with him. It was left with Marshal McLuhan to acclaim, reinterpret, and overwrite Innis's thesis of the influence of communications in the unfolding of history. When Harold Innis died, he was eulogized as Canada's most influential social scientist and as the author of the classic history of the Canadian fur trade. His second incarnation as "the father of modern communication studies,"[1] really only got underway well after his death.

Interpreting Innis has its difficulties. He was an interdisciplinary scholar whose work drew upon and enriched many academic disciplines. His oblique, sometimes cryptic, style has not discouraged a proliferation of interpretation, some of it contradictory. His work has been studied under the rubrics of economics, Canadian history, political science, geography, and communications to name the most prevalent. Generally, these studies have been most concerned with Innis's ideas as they apply respectively to individual disciplines. A narrow focus on discipline has tended to ignore the larger picture of the man and the inter-related development of his work. Innis was complex in his evolving role as a leading academic and scholar.

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[1] Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Alfred Knopff, 1992), 9.

I undertook this study of Harold Innis to answer, what was for me, a puzzling question. How did this fur trade historian come to investigate the revolutionary effects of communications media? How did he make that startling intellectual leap? Innis left no explanation himself and the few who have considered this question have passed over it quickly. Obviously there was a continuum, but his writings were so prolix, thematically scattered, and out of context, I could not find the thread. As an aid to my inquiry, I found it necessary to create an episodic biography which paired the development of his writings to the circumstances of his life. I found I had to study the course of his life in order to make sense of certain key episodes which demonstrated his thought and principles in action. I also found that my question had greater implications. To unravel this one thread, there were other strands which demanded some explanation. I had to answer related questions before I could consider my query. I had to step back for a bigger picture. I had to perceive the man, not only by the records of his thought, but in the context of his life and his times. I found that biography offered the best organizing principle to find the patterns in the ideas of this complex, confusing, and dauntingly prolific thinker. Once I made sense of his life, I could follow his perplexing intellectual leap from fur to media. Biography became my window into the history of ideas.

Chapter 1

THE FOUNDATION OF CHARACTER

History is the record of an encounter
between character and circumstance ....
the encounter between character and circumstance
is essentially a story

Donald Creighton
"History and Literature"

November 10, 1952 was a somber day on the University of Toronto campus. Afternoon classes had been canceled as the university was preparing to hold funeral services to mourn the loss of one of its greatest scholars. Two days earlier, on November 8, after a long illness which had kept him from the fall term, Harold Adams Innis had finally died of cancer. Born on November 5, 1894, Harold Innis had just marked his 58th birthday. It was a cold grey fall day as faculty and students crowded into Convocation Hall to hear the memorial service. The University community gathered to commemorate Innis with such honours that his daughter would remember that the service was held "with a pomp that overwhelmed me with despair."[2] Sidney E. Smith, President of the University of Toronto, declared in his tribute that:

> No Canadian scholar of his generation has had so profound an

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[2] Anne Innis Dagg, "Memories of My Father," *Queen's Quarterly* 101 (Spring 1994): 79.

> influence on so many fields of thought and investigation on history, economics, sociology, political science and law.[3]

Smith was not alone in his high esteem for the influence of Innis. The Toronto *Globe* wrote, "The death of Professor Harold A. Innis deprives this country of one of its most distinguished scholars."[4] The *Times* of London recorded that, "probably no other Canadian scholar in the last quarter of a century has won equal prestige abroad."[5] The Ottawa *Citizen*, in a memorial signed by Dr. R. A. MacKay, Assistant Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, observed that "Professor H. A. Innis was perhaps the most influential Canadian social scientist of his generation."[6] Frank H. Knight, a former instructor of Innis at the University of Chicago, wrote in condolences, "The early death of Harold Innis is a serious loss to social science and philosophy, to the whole intellectual life, in the English-speaking world and beyond."[7] Innis's doctoral adviser at Chicago, Chester Wright wrote, "I know of no scholar who has done more for the economic history of any country than he did for that of Canada. The loss for world scholarship is also great."[8] Perhaps in death, generosity and high praise is expected from colleagues. However, his frequent adversary, Canadian historian, Frank Underhill, wrote:

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[3] University of Toronto Archives, Harold Adams Innis Papers, Accession Number B72-0003 /005 (41) Memorial Address by President Sidney E. Smith.

[4] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (21) Clipping, Toronto *Globe*, Nov. 10, 1952.

[5] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (21) Clipping, London *Times*, Nov. 12, 1952.

[6] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (21) Clipping, Ottawa *Citizen*, Nov. 10, 1952.

[7] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (17) Letter of condolence from Frank H. Knight, Nov. 30, 1952. U. of Chicago.

[8] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (17) Letter of condolence from Chester W. Wright, Nov. 16, 1952. Chicago.

> He was the biggest man in the social sciences of our time, and I couldn't reckon how much I have owed in my own thinking to his insights, some of which seemed rather fantastic when I first ran across them. But they always grew on one as one pondered them.[9]

Innis's death prompted many spontaneous letters of condolence to the family. One writer, identified only as Wayne P. from Paris wrote, "I think he has had a broader and deeper influence on my ways of thought than anyone else, except my mother."[10] All this seems high praise for a conspicuously rumpled university professor.

At the time of his death, Innis's list of accomplishments were impressive. For 32 years, from 1920–1952 he had been a university teacher at Toronto. He became the Head of the Department of Political Economy in 1937 and held that position for 15 years. In 1947, he added Dean of Graduate Studies to his responsibilities, holding both offices until his death in 1952. At the time of his death he held office as the President of the Economic History Association, the first Canadian president for that American organization. He was a former President of the Canadian Political Sciences Association and a former President of the Royal Society of Canada. He had served on the Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Economic Enquiry, the Manitoba Royal Commission on Adult Education, and Ottawa's Royal Commission on Transportation. He had won the Tyrell Medal in History. He was granted honourary Doctor of Laws by the University of New Brunswick, McMaster

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[9] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (17) Letter of condolence from Frank Underhill, Nov. 21, 1952.

[10] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (17) Letter of condolence from Wayne P., Nov. 10, Paris, France.

University, the University of Manitoba and the University of Glasgow in Scotland. Innis also received an honourary *Doctorat ès. science* from Laval University in Montreal. He was a founding member of the Canadian Political Science Association. He was also instrumental in founding Canadian academic journals such as *Contributions to Canadian Economics* in 1928, and the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* in 1935. The Carnegie Endowment, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation all requested his advice on dispensing awards in Canada. He delivered the Beit Lectures at Oxford, the Cust Lecture in Nottingham and the Stamp Lectures in London. He conducted public feuds with academics who strayed into active politics. He published prolifically with important books and a large number of essays, reviews and addresses. As Head of Political Economy he established Sociology as an academic discipline at the University of Toronto. He was invited to be a member of the first delegation to attend the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the devastated Soviet Union immediately at the end of WW II. His speeches were reported in newspapers. His threats of resignation intimidated academic administrations. Harold Innis was lionized. It had been a long way to come, for a poor Baptist farm boy from Otterville, Ontario.

It seems odd that, with the sole exception of his close personal friend Donald Creighton (1902-1979), no one else has published a biography of Harold Innis. Creighton's book, *Harold Adams Innis: Portrait of a Scholar*, is a memorial to, and an adulation of, a man he sincerely admired.[11] Donald Creighton has been described as the leading Canadian historian of his generation and an advocate of the Laurentian Thesis, an idea which was inspired by the economic history of Harold Innis. Creighton accepted Innis's idea that the geography of great river systems shaped the growth pattern of civilizations and he accepted Innis's explanations for the historical pattern of Canadian economic development. From this agreement, he filled in the social histories which highlighted political and commercial activities found in the larger process. Creighton owed a large intellectual debt to Innis and this slim biography can be seen as one way in which he discharged that debt.

Creighton's biography offered his view of Harold Innis as a great Canadian scholar. Initially, he resisted writing Innis's biography because he felt that, as an historian, he did not possess the conceptual tools of a political scientist or an economist to properly explain Innis's thought. After being convinced by fellow insiders from Innis's circle, Creighton relented and undertook the biography. "I wrote under a fresh, deep sense of personal bereavement and loss .... I prefer to let the book stand as my original tribute to a good friend and a great scholar."[12] The book was published in 1957, not quite five years after Innis's death.

Creighton's biography is lyric, written with short, bold strokes. He tells his story with fascination. Harold Adams Innis was born on November 5,

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[11] Donald Creighton, *Harold Adams Innis: Portrait of a Scholar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957; reprint 1978).

[12] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, xiii.

1894, the first child of William Anson Innis and Mary Adams Innis. The Innis family had settled in New Brunswick after the Revolutionary War, before Harold's branch moved to Upper Canada. The Adams were more recent arrivals from Scotland. Apparently Mary Adams had chosen William Innis to be her husband because of his family's strict Baptist background which demonstrated the "highest reputation for temperance, probity, and hard-work; and honest sobriety."[13]

The family settled down onto a hundred acre farm in South Norwich and with hard work and resourcefulness, managed to make modest improvements to their circumstances. Harold was followed by three siblings over the next ten years: Lillian, Hughena and Samuel. To all accounts, Innis was deeply influenced by the rhythms of rural life and was taken with nature. He did well in public school and his parents sacrificed, allowing him to move on to high school rather than requiring him to work on the farm as would be customary. Beginning at the local Otterville High School, Innis soon transferred to Woodstock Collegiate Institute for its complete academic program. Woodstock was a large town 20 miles away and the Collegiate was closely affiliated with the Baptist community. At the end of his high school years, Innis briefly taught school. His father was a county public school trustee and had arranged for Harold to be the replacement teacher at the one room school house of his former public school until a permanent teacher could be found. This position lasted the fall term of 1912. He was 18. The following September, rather than take up teacher training, he decided to attend university. Perhaps his experience in the field prompted second thoughts.

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[13] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 6.

Farm, family and faith were the formative influences of Innis's life. His parents were devout Baptists who had inculcated a strict moral tone within the Innis family. They were rural folk who struggled to make modest returns on their mixed farm. His mother had gone to college and both of his parents valued learning and encouraged his talents. His classroom successes demonstrated that Harold Innis had a gift for education. He worked hard at his education in a family and community which practiced Baptist self reliance and celebrated the work ethic. It was Innis's ambition for schooling which began to draw him away from the fundamental simplicity of Otterville.

In 1913, Toronto was the second largest city in the Dominion with a population of over four hundred thousand, and, unlike its larger rival, Montreal, Toronto entertained a reputation for moral seriousness. McMaster University, where Innis enrolled, was a small Baptist institution which at that time was located in Toronto and no doubt contributed in its own way to Toronto's goodly reputation. University life was a difficult transition for Innis. He was poor and he had difficulty fitting in. Discouraged, he decided that he would not return after the Christmas break. His mother called on the aid of her brother, William Adams, a medical student at Western University, to change Innis's mind. Adams had a deep talk with the young sophomore, and convinced Innis to accept his parents' financial support and return to

McMaster.

An entry in his McMaster diary gives a snapshot of Innis's fundamental attitude and Christian orientation as he moved away from home and into the world of university.

> Do not go into the presence of temptation ... Be forearmed. Link up with other men. Associate yourself sufficiently with Christ. Keep your eyes in the right direction... Take Christ as the great solvent of your doubt... Be decisive. Spend time unhurriedly in daily prayer... A dominant purpose to live the right life. Christianity a life spirit and method of living.[14]

After Innis finally settled into university life, he found professors who were inspirational in helping him determine his interests. He had an instructor, W. S. Wallace, for whom he was "enthusiastic." Wallace was an Oxford graduate who lectured in History and Canadian History. Later he would become the head Librarian at the University of Toronto, and the first editor of the *Canadian Historical Review.* In his memoirs, Innis remembered Wallace as saying, "liberty is not possible without order."[15] Innis also recalled that Wallace taught that, "the economic interpretation of history is not the only interpretation but it is the deepest interpretation." These are principles which remain clearly in evidence throughout the development of Innis's ideas. Innis's decision to specialize in political economy shows the power of an inspirational university teacher. Innis greatly admired W. J. Donald, who lectured in political economy, recording that Donald's "youth and enthusiasm attracted students and led me to select economics as my chief field of interest."

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[14] Cited by John A. Watson, "Marginal Man, Harold Innis's Communications Works in Context." (Ph.D. dissertation, Political Science, University of Toronto, 1981), 119.

[15] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /036 (01) "Autobiography," 39-40. Hereafter "Autobiography."

His experiences at McMaster University were the beginning of an important transition in which he moved into the secular world. It seems ironic that McMaster, which was a Baptist institution, prompted Innis to critically examine his faith. McMaster University had been established in 1887 under provincial charter as a Baptist university. It was formed by the amalgamation of Woodstock College founded in 1857, and Toronto Baptist College founded in 1881. McMaster opened in Toronto in 1890, where it remained until 1930 when McMaster University departed Toronto for Hamilton.

James Ten Broeke, professor of Philosophy, was the first to provide Innis with an alternative to his fundamentalist grasp of Baptism. Broeke believed that Christian faith could be deepened, rather than injured, by inquiry. Broeke proved influential to Innis's thinking in considering the kind of questions to pose. Forty years later, in the preface to *The Bias of Communications*, (1952) Innis would revisit the problem posed by Broeke: "Why do we attend to the things to which we attend?"[16] Evidently Innis had taken this question to heart and presented a collection of essays four decades later as his attempt to answer to this question.

Innis's commitment to his Baptist faith became an important issue as he faced increasing pressure from his family, particularly his mother, to become a Baptist minister. The Baptist faith, as practiced at that time in Ontario, placed emphasis on adult Baptism in which mature individuals confirm their faith by choice after the age of eighteen. Baptists practiced total body immersion in water as a symbol of entry into the congregation. They were also avid proponents for the separation of church and state. Baptist faith was individualist and churches were independent, self organized and accountable only to the congregation. As Protestants and dissenters, Baptists reserved the right to read the scriptures for themselves, understanding that as each person was a student of the scriptures, each person could therefore teach and evangelize the scripture. Young Innis, as his journal indicates, consciously reflected the values of this faith. However, in the autumn of 1915, at the time he came of age to confirm and openly proclaim his faith, Innis did not ask for baptism.

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[16] Harold Adams Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, intro. by Paul Heyer and David Crowley, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951; reprint 1991), xxvii.

After so precarious a beginning, Innis's university career blossomed. He considered becoming a lawyer, so he worked on oratory, winning the annual oratorical contest and subsequently becoming president of the debating society. He stood first class in history, won a prize in philosophy, and won a scholarship in political economy. In the summer of 1915 he returned to teaching public school for the earnings. The teacherage was near Vermilion in northern Alberta.[17] This was Innis's first trip into the larger Canada and it provided an observation which he claimed had critical influence on the development of his thinking.

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[17] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 25.

> I was struck on my way out [to Alberta] by a fact which must impress all travelers to the west, that Northern Ontario seemed to be nothing but rocks with scarcely a handful of soil and I saw for the first time the significance of this vast stretch of territory to Canada.[18]

Innis's conception of the way the Canadian Shield defined Canada was an idea he would take up and exercise to great effect in his studies of the fur trade and other staple goods.

When Innis returned from the prairies that fall, World War I was already one year old. He enrolled for the final year of his program in September of 1915 just as the demands of war were reaching deeper into Canada. Early in 1916 Prime Minister Borden, pressured by the appetite of the accelerating war, called out for 500,000 Canadian soldiers. This was in a country with a population of seven million. A program was put in place so that senior university students who enlisted were awarded their degrees without examination. Since Innis was in his last year, he had this option, but instead decided to write exams to win his degree. He was facing a dilemma. Should he enlist or should he stay out of the war? His family had gone to some effort to provide an easy way to avoid the war if he would take it. Arrangements had been made for Innis to take over the ministry of a rural Baptist church. This offer was presented although he had not made his public proclamation of faith. Innis considered the offer and may have been tempted, but in the end, like so many others of his generation, he found a deep moral justification for going to war. He wrote home with his reasons. The German actions were offensive to Christian values and as a Christian, he felt he must help defend moral order. The young man wrote, "If I had no faith in Christianity, I don't think I would go."[19]

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[18] Innis, "Autobiography," 44.

> You will wonder what has struck me but the fact of the matter is I have been thinking. . . it is because if the Christian religion is worth anything to me it is the only thing I can do. If you were not Christians I don't know how I should write to you. If I shouldn't go I could (not) content myself with the fact that I had not lived up to my duty, that Christ had asked me once to take up his cross and follow him and I hadn't been able to do it.[20]

Harold Innis became a Christian soldier, took up his duty and marched off to war.

World War I was a wrenching event which toppled the old order and inflicted catastrophe on innumerable lives. It is the bloodiest war Canada has fought. Over 60,000 Canadian troops were killed in action during WW I.[21] The volunteers of WW I died in appalling circumstances, their lives spent in a war where the primary strategy was to throw men against machines. Nineteenth century military thinking confronted the new technologies of warfare. The machine gun, barbed wire, and poison gas defeated the old strategy of mass attack. With the widespread introduction of new techniques of machine warfare, armies could be wiped out as quickly as they could be entered on the field. All along the Western Front, from Belgium to France, the combatants mirrored each other's strategy, Germans on the north of the line and the British and French on the south. A war of stalemate and hemorrhage was fought from entrenched positions. Big guns were set back from the front as their ranges would permit. Parallel rows of German and Allied trenches faced each other anchored by heavy machine guns and fenced by barbed wire. In between was "no man's land," a killing ground churned by artillery. Soldiers were commanded to "go over the top," through their own barbed wire, into the teeth of machine gun fire, heavy bombardment, and occasional poison gas; to slip through the muck and craters strewn with dead, to pick through enemy barbed wire, and then engage the German infantry. A lot of manpower was required to maintain this strategy.

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[19] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 31.

[20] Letter, as cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 118-119.

[21] In comparison 40,000 troops were killed in WW II with a population of over eleven million.

By the time the Germans signed the Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919, Austria-Hungary had already collapsed spilling new states across central Europe. The Bolsheviks were in the process of seizing the wreckage of the Russian Empire. The Ottoman Empire was rolled back, reduced to a Turkish rump. Belgium had been chewed up and France had come perilously close to defeat. Britain lost her economic dominance to the United States, and the Dominions, including Canada, experienced the war as a crucible in which a national self consciousness emerged to challenge British identification. In Europe, ten million soldiers were killed in action, twenty million wounded. Over thirty states had been involved. The old order in Europe had collapsed and all this change was costly for the participants.

Mary Quayle Innis, Harold Innis's wife and literary executor, left some reminiscences in the Innis papers. Among her comments, it is clear that she thought Creighton's biography weak in one section. She wrote: "I don't think the influence of the war is sufficiently stressed."[22] There is overwhelming evidence that the war changed Innis profoundly. It seems to have shaken him to the depths of his character. Prior to the war, Innis had been sheltered in the Baptist institutions of church, school, and family. The war exacted a harsh rounding out of his life experience. He was exposed to men he never would have voluntarily associated with, in a setting equal to any conception of Christian Hell, and under a British command structure in which the stupid competed with the brutal for the right to give orders.

After graduating University in May of 1916, Innis presented himself for duty at the 69th Battery at the Armories on University Avenue. After a brief leave, he shipped out of Union Station on July 13 to a troop ship in Montreal. By July's end he was in England at Shorncliffe camp in Kent where, after three months of courses and examination, he learned gunnery and signaling. His unit landed in Le Havre and by December 1916, he arrived at the front in the Lens district of France. He was transferred to the 4th Field Battery of the First Brigade of the First Division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

It had been popular among McMaster students to chose signaling as their career in the armed services. The belief on campus was that signalers had safe jobs. In writing of his decision to enlist, Innis had mentioned to his sister that the infantry "was no place for a man if he wanted to come back alive."[23] He told her that signalers and artillery men were "a long way back from the firing line." As it turned out his position as a signal man did not keep him out of action. Instead it put him right on the front line.

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[22] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /036 (08) Note in the hand of Mary Quayle Innis. n.d.

> The task of the signalers was chiefly that of laying telephone lines to suitable observation posts in the district ... and in working on shifts with officers and keeping in touch with the Battery. If lines were broken by German shells a party of 2 was sent to locate the damage and make repairs.[24]

Working with maps, telephones and field glasses, signalers corrected the shelling of enemy targets. After bombardment began, the signalers would inform the gunners how successful they were in hitting the targets. Signal men were the eyes of the battery and they operated to keep the lines of communication open. Modern artillery warfare depended upon reliable channels of information to be effective.

Innis left several accounts of the war in letters, notes, and reminiscences. During the war he wrote reassuring letters to his parents. Every letter, as was well known, was cleared by military censors and some of his letters were censored on minor things. Innis also kept a little war diary. He scratched down incidents in point form on the page margins and in the calendar of a small military guidebook. This was a discrete precaution because for reasons of security, diary writing at the front was forbidden by command. He later used his letters to prompt his memory of the war when he gathered his reminiscences in his "Autobiography." The "Autobiography" presented his war experiences as he saw them thirty years later, while the diary captured the immediate details of day to day survival at the front.

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[23] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 33.
[24] Innis, "Autobiography," 57.

Harold Innis's experience of the front seems typical of a Canadian soldier. He was appalled by the harsh discipline exacted by British command. He was deeply offended by certain forms of field punishment imposed on the ranks, especially "the cruelty of cartwheel crucifixion." Innis noted this practice with plain feeling:

> men, volunteers, spread-eagled to cartwheels, tied there for hours in a biting, bone-chilling wind all because the fellow had not shined a button or given some snobby officer a proper deference. . . . and these men had left good jobs and homes and had come, as the orators said, to fight for right and loved ones.[25]

He felt that British officers treated Canadians with "insolence and brutality"[26] Sometimes he was left hungry. Mud was omnipresent and it got into everything, especially the food. Innis complained to his mother that "the only way this country could be muddier, would be to be bigger."[27] Yet he reflected that, compared to hard ground, muddy ground was a safer place to be during shelling as mud dampened the power of the explosions. Innis described living through bombardment: "machine guns like rivets or woodpeckers all through the night and the more or less continuous roar of the guns." His wartime observations are written in point form in his notorious crabbed hand.[28] This diary presented a condensed montage of his war experience, quick little notes, briefer than telegrams.[29] He wrote of the infestation of body lice, and rats swarming in the trenches. He wrote of watching Charlie Chaplin movies and the constant shelling and sleepless nights. He saw his comrades killed and he carried the dead. He buried a man in a shell hole. He saw soldiers strewn about, their faces blackened by death. He was subjected to a gas attack. He laid telephone cable. He had a "miraculous escape." He put his farm skills to use and tended horses. He was bored by all the monotony and learned how to play solitaire. He drank rum. He played poker. He wrote many letters home. He was bawled out by a superior. He witnessed the new aerial warfare.

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[25] War diary, as cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 161.

[26] Innis, "Autobiography," 50.

[27] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 33.

> Airplane came down headlong while making spiral dive. Got new tunic; an awful crash Intestines all over the machine; head off the pilot.[30].

Students of Innis's later style, will recognize the clipped sentences with parts of speech, especially the articles, shorn away, and his curious *non sequitor,* "got new tunic," in the middle of his grim account.

Harold Innis was lucky. He was at the assault of Vimy Ridge from April 9 -14, 1917 but his unit was held back, in reserve.[31] Vimy Ridge saw the innovation of the rolling barrage planned under the command of the Canadian Corps. The big guns lay down a rain of shells which slowly advanced to, and through, the German front. Canadian infantry closely followed the creeping bombardment which kept the enemy machine gunners crouched under cover and inoperative. At the battle of Vimy this strategy was a success and the Canadians dislodged the Germans from their positions at the cost of 10,602 Canadian casualties including 3,598 dead. The French and the British had each tried to storm Vimy previously but had been thrown back. The Canadians prided themselves on 'their' victory which was the most successful 'British' victory in the war to that time. The Canadians dug in and held Vimy against counterattack.

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[28] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /002 (14) War diary.

[29] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /002 (19) Transcript of war diary, 12-28.

[30] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /002 (19) Transcript of war diary, 21.

[31] Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986), 311.

Three months later on July 7, Innis pulled a double shift and was out on reconnaissance at night with two others. A German observation balloon had seen Innis's party and called the artillery down upon them. The first shell exploded out of range but the second shell exploded close by, knocking Innis over. A piece of shrapnel had torn through his right thigh, hit the bone and fractured his femur. His scholarly habits proved fortuitous. "At least one shell splinter was stopped by books."[32] He was hospitalized, sick and feverish with infection. Yet within a week he was writing his mother, referring to "this comfortable little affair of mine."[33] Harold Innis had won his "blighty." A blighty was a wound serious enough to take a soldier out of action but not serious enough to mutilate him. On the front line blighties were a ticket out. He was removed to London for convalescence where he began to walk with the aid of a stick. He was returned to Canada in January, 1918. After some hesitation, and perhaps only in consideration of his status as a student, a medical board officially released him from military service in April of 1918. Innis was more than glad to get out of the army and eager to return to studies.

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[32] Innis, "Autobiography," 68. The military hardcover notebook may be found in the UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /002 (21) Entry and exit hole is quite evident.

[33] As cited by Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 36.

For the chapter of Innis's life that it closed, his Canadian Expeditionary Force Discharge Certificate is an innocuous document.[34] The bureaucrats spelled his name wrong as "Innes." He was described as 23 years old, six feet one and three quarters inches tall, of medium complexion with hazel eyes and brown hair. His rank was Gunner. The military estimated his character and conduct "very good" and their remarks noted that he was "entitled to wear one gold stripe." After his discharge, it is unlikely that Innis ever took the privilege of wearing his gold stripe. Although he maintained an interest in news of his former battalion comrades, Innis studiously avoided military ceremonies and Remembrance Day services.

> It has not been long since most of us have been awakened by nightmares of intense shellfire, and even now the military bands played with such enthusiasm by young men are intolerable, and Armistice Day celebrations are emotionally impossible.[35]

Later in 1918 while accepting a toast for the returned soldiers during a function at the University of Chicago, Innis disrupted the tone of the patriotic event. Rather than parrot the words "I am glad to be back" which had been suggested by the chairman of the event, Innis brought his own words. His speaking notes lay down a barrage of images which are very close to poetry.

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[34] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /002 (06).

[35] As cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 144.

> As we had imagined it:
> afraid the war would end
> chasing Germans with bayonets
> Pleasure of going over the top
> Loaded down with German helmets (trophies)
>
> As we found it:
> Bully beef and hard tack
> (railway) cars mark 8 horses or 40 men
> ditching ammunition,
> bayonets used to toast bread and cut wood
> Filling of sandbags.
> Helmets to wash in
> damned dull, damned duty and damned monotony of it
> continual mud
> continual reading of sheets (maps)
> continual bread, marmalade and tea
> continual shelling
> hide and seek warfare
> With the monotony came fear
> Instinctive location of deep dug-outs
> Mathematical probability of shells
> landing in the same place twice
> Flattening against the trench wall
> Drinking poisoned water
> How long we were (at) battery
> eating cordite
> Gradual longing
> for blighty
> Before these influences all men are alike
> Canadians
> English
> Scotch
> Americans[36]

After this singular contribution to the American war effort, Innis was no longer invited to represent veterans at campus events.

A generation of Canadians were profoundly altered by the experience of war. Innis left some record of how he thought he was influenced. His personal experiences in the Army had exposed him to an "understanding of individuals which I never otherwise had."[37] The war left Innis politically affected in his outlook towards Britain and the United States. He noted that being subject to the brutality of British command had the result of "hastening demands for autonomy throughout the Commonwealth."[38] The war was a stimulus for many English-speaking Canadians to stop seeing themselves as British. Innis also developed a problem with what he saw as typically rude American behavior. "This antipathy very acute at first, I suspect never really came to an end in spite of the extraordinary kindness of individual Americans."[39] We should be mindful that this "antipathy" towards Americans was only emphasized in the latter part of his life. Innis had freely exercised a life-long association with American academic institutions, and his bride was from Chicago. However, with his divorce from British identity and with his antipathy towards the American, Innis consciously nurtured his own Canadian identification. As with so many Canadian soldiers, the war had created in Harold Innis a "tremendous affection"[40] for his native land.

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[36] As cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 123.

As well as political change, the war stimulated personal change. In the army he picked up card-playing, acquiring a lifelong habit of solitaire. He also picked up the habit of smoking cigarettes and taking the occasional drink, practices vigorously condemned by his Baptist faith.[41] Most remarkably, after the war he made a point of no longer attending church. Quite evidently, the war redefined the boundaries of what he regarded to be appropriate moral behavior.

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[37] Innis, "Autobiography," 91.

[38] Innis, "Autobiography," 50.

[39] Innis, "Autobiography," 86.

[40] Innis, "Autobiography," 126.

[41] Innis's Baptist relatives regarded smoking "to be as much of a sin as they regarded drinking." Innis Dagg, "Memories of My Father," 83.

Even before he left the army, Innis had returned his attention to his studies. During his convalescence in Britain, Innis enrolled in Khaki College, an educational institution which was established for Canadian soldiers who wished to continue their studies.[42] He won a prize for a paper which he submitted entitled "The Press." He exchanged correspondence with McMaster University on how to satisfy thesis requirements for a Masters of Arts degree, indicating at one point his difficulties in locating a copy of Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics*.[43] While in England, Innis began his thesis, "The Returned Soldier," which contained recommendations for measures which the Canadian government might employ to reintroduce veterans to civilian life. On April 19, 1918, Innis took the MA exams and was awarded his Masters degree on April 30 at McMaster. Having also received his military discharge that same April he was at loose ends for the summer. Innis's intentions were to enter law school in the upcoming fall. However, he seized the opportunity to enroll in economics at the University of Chicago summer school. Before he committed to law Innis wanted to give economics one last chance and as he received a modest allowance as a veteran he could meet the costs.

Because the University of Chicago had originally been established as a Baptist college, McMaster University had enjoyed traditional links with the senior institution. In fact, several of the faculty at McMaster had been educated at Chicago. This connection pointed Innis to Chicago. This summer school was the turning point which convinced Innis that he wanted to study economics rather than law. Curiously, this seems a decision he was predisposed to make, but felt he had to justify.

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[42] Henry Marshall Tory took leave as president of the University of Alberta to become the first president of Khaki College in 1917. The college, which was based on a proposal Tory wrote for the National Council of the YMCA, provided some 50,000 Canadians with a variety of courses during WW I. This educational model was later adopted by other military forces.

[43] The standard Economics text book of the times. J. K. Galbraith used it when he was an undergraduate in the 1930's at Berkeley. "It was a majestic book. It was also superb for discouraging second-rate scholars." Galbraith recalls: "Marshall ... presided over the world of Anglo-American economics in nearly undisputed eminence for forty years—from 1885 until his death in 1924." John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 198.

> I still had an uneasy conscience that I knew very little about the subject of economics and that in fairness to myself make some effort to gain a more intensive acquaintance.[44]

Innis added that he "never felt completely equipped to go into the profession of law." His reasoning seemed defensive as if he anticipated criticism for not choosing lawyering. Perhaps it was difficult to explain to his family why his enthusiasm for the abstract study of economics drew him so far from home.

In the fall of 1918 he enrolled in the doctoral program in Economics at the University of Chicago. Chester S. Wright, who lectured in economic history, became his thesis adviser. Frank Knight, who Innis found particularly inspirational, was a professor of economic theory and statistics. Innis was humbled by Knight's grasp of economics. He was hired to mark papers and was given an elementary economics class to teach under professor Wright's supervision. In considering his doctoral thesis he asked Wright for advice on a Canadian topic. As it happened, W. J. Donald, the much-admired instructor at McMaster who had originally inspired Innis's interest in economics, also had been educated at Chicago and, perhaps not so coincidentally, had been a previous student of Wright. Donald's dissertation was published as *The Canadian Iron and Steel Industry* while Innis was still his student at McMaster.[45] Wright suggested that Innis consider writing an account of the Canadian Pacific Railway, as a study of the railway would be a natural complement to Donald's research on iron and steel.

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[44] "Autobiography," as cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 148.

[45] Robin Neill, *A New Theory of Value: The Canadian Economics of H. A. Innis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 11.

Innis's dissertation was a sprawling account of the CPR. He researched in the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa, and also in Montreal. At the end of July, 1920, Innis wheeled his more than 600 page dissertation into Chester Wright's office. By Innis's account, Wright "gasped" when he saw it.[46] The thesis was published as *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* in 1923 and any reader of the book can sympathize with his supervisor's reaction. It is a daunting book, an unrelenting mass of facts, his style awkward, and his grammar ambiguous. The content was a blizzard of data. Innis restricted his explanations of the influence of the railway to the introduction and the conclusion. Between these brackets he recorded economic transactions in painstaking detail. The introduction and the conclusion seem tacked on. Readers may be left with the impression that Innis expected the facts to explain themselves, and that he had fully discharged his duty by merely assembling the facts. However, he was working from a theoretical framework and an examination of his introduction can reveal his conceptual tools.

In the preface, Innis stated that he intended to trace the history of the CPR "from an evolutionary and scientific point of view,"[47] and that from this viewpoint he would not utter value judgments. This was a nod to the objective methodology as promoted in Chicago by the preeminent social scientists of the day. Innis also offered a sustained and most curious apologia for his railway history. He stated that his account could not "make recommendations" because it did not attempt "to state a definitive objective."

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[46] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 48.

[47] Harold A. Innis, *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*, forward by Peter George, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1923; reprint 1971), xx. Hereafter *CPR*.

He therefore cautioned that "no conclusions can be reached." He made "no claim" for the merits or demerits of his method, rather his intention was to make this an exercise in history. He expected "protest" since he used existing historical literature as "material" without adopting the judgments contained in that literature. With all hope of utility warned off, Innis began his story of the CPR.

According to Harold Innis, the search for the North-West Passage and the completion of the CPR were "landmarks in the spread of Western civilization over the northern half of North America."[48] Innis explained that the dynamic of civilization "was dependent on the geographical characteristics of the area and on the character and institutions of the people involved." Here is a clear articulation of one of his most enduring themes — the influence of geography on human affairs. He believed that the speed and direction in which civilization developed was "largely dominated by physical characteristics" of the land, such as geological formations, climate, topography, and the associated flora and fauna. As rivers were the chief architects of topography they were of "primary importance." Three drainage basins; the Saint Lawrence, the Arctic, and the Pacific, were the routes of civilization into Canada. Innis argued that the development of the CPR was the physical evidence that civilization had transcended the templates scribed by those rivers. He argued that economies were based on the specific nature of their geography. He argued that regions of Canada were politically integrated but needed the economic integration which the railroad provided.[49] He concluded that railroad technology had side effects, and when the CPR was completed, the character of the regions changed.

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[48] Innis, *CPR*, 1-2.

[49] Innis, *CPR*, 74.

> With this addition to technological equipment, the civilization of these areas changed in its character, and its extent, and became more closely a part of a civilization narrowly described as Canadian, and typically, western. [50]

The railway acted to integrate the regions more closely to the heart of empire. He explained that the influence of the railway demonstrated the effect of technology on culture. He characterized railway technology as an instrument of change within civilizations.

> The history of the Canadian Pacific Railroad is primarily the history of the spread of western civilization over the northern half of the North American continent. The addition of technical equipment described as physical property of the Canadian Pacific Railway was a cause and an effect of the strength and character of that civilization. The construction of the road was the result of the direction of energy to the conquest of geographical barriers. The effects of the road were measured to some extent by the changes in the strength and character of that civilization in the period following its construction.[51]

The purpose of rail technology was to conquer geographic barriers. The railway was both a product and an indicator of the expansion of civilization. It was also an engine by which civilization changed its character. Innis referred to the themes which preoccupied his thinking, the influence of geography; and the influence of technology on civilization.

> The growth and character of the freight traffic were to a large extent indices of the effectiveness of the physical property of the road as a part of the technological equipment of western civilization in North America.[52]

Innis did not look at goods as only products in themselves, but looked at the traffic of goods as representing the relationships between sources of supply and the market. This was a way of tracking the imperial impact on the frontier, and the frontier's reciprocal response to the empire. In his analysis, Innis was as interested in exploring the importance of the channel of exchange as he was the content of exchange or, in other words, describing the relationship between trade goods and the trade technologies which were employed to deliver the goods. He saw transportation systems as the physical embodiment and symbol of economic and imperial relationships. It seems that Innis viewed the construction of the CPR as the metaphorical resolution of the quest for the North-West Passage.

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[50] Innis, *CPR*, 128.

[51] Innis, *CPR*, 287.

[52] Innis, *CPR*, 171.

In his "Autobiography" Innis referred to his influences at Chicago. In the first place he recognized professor C. S. Duncan:

> I had been greatly influenced by Professor C. S. Duncan in his lectures on Marketing by the emphasis on the relationship between the physical characteristics of a commodity and the marketing structure built up in relation to it.[53]

There was also the more notorious Thorstein Veblen, a homegrown American economic philosopher of Norwegian extraction from the farm country of Minnesota. Among other things, Veblen had prodded the rich for their "conspicuous consumption" in his most famous book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. With his caustic social criticism and his predilection for attracting scandal by his affairs with faculty wives, Veblen found it necessary to move from university to university. He had taught at Chicago prior to

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[53] Innis, "Autobiography," 125.

Innis's time and he had left behind an indelible influence. Innis continued:

> I had also read intensively as a result of my contact with graduate students in Chicago, the readings of Thorstein Veblen, in which the same point [as C. S. Duncan's] had been made but in a more general fashion.

Veblen's economics had a sociological interest, and they also expressed a fascination with the effects of technology on the economy and society. Later Innis, like Veblen, would also develop a sociological interest in the consequences of technology on human affairs. From Duncan and Veblen, it is clear that Innis had been prompted to see important relationships between the physical nature of a good and the distribution systems which came into being to market that good. We can see Innis trying out those ideas in his conclusion of the CPR.

The fall of 1920 must have been an exciting time for Harold Innis. He was twenty-five years old when he was offered a position as a lecturer at the University of Toronto. He had turned down teaching in the United States and he had been in the process of making an agreement to teach at Brandon College in Manitoba when the offer from Toronto materialized. In deciding in favour of Toronto, Innis ignored a series of letters from McMaster urging him to honour his prior commitment to Brandon. He wrote to his fiancé stating that "with the possible exception of McGill," Toronto "was the best university in Canada ... by no small margin."[54] In comparison, Brandon was a small Baptist college in rural Manitoba which had not the authority set or mark its own student examinations. Choosing the University of Toronto over Brandon College seems a good career move for any young ambitious academic.

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[54] Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 46.

The University of Toronto had been founded in 1827 as King's College, under a royal charter, to serve the Anglican population of Upper Canada. It was converted to a public institution in 1850 becoming the nondenominational University of Toronto. The new institution accommodated a college system in which several religious denominations were federated with the University of Toronto but maintained control of their independent ability to grant degrees in theology. Victoria College (1841) was Methodist, University Centre (1850) was the secular institution, Trinity College (1851) was Anglican, and St. Michael's College (1852) was Roman Catholic. The University of Toronto expanded quickly after the turn of the century establishing faculties such as home economics (1906), education (1907), forestry (1907), social work (1914), nursing (1920) and graduate studies (1922). Innis joined the Department of Political Economy as a lecturer in economic geography.

Political Economy is no longer a familiar concept in the division of academic disciplines. It was first studied at university in the later half of the nineteenth century. Politics and economics were seen to have natural association along with economic history and geography. The study of political economy concerned itself with understanding the interrelationship of political and economic forces. Specialization and growth, particularly in

Economics, has since driven these disciplines apart. The Political Economy Department at Toronto housed a disparate collection of social sciences, and at one time included Political Science, Economics, Social Work, Commerce, Law, and Sociology.

Harold Innis joined as the seventh member of the Department of Political Economy. Department head, James Mavor, who had a reputation for idiosyncrasy and organizational deficiency, was approaching retirement. Senior members were W. Jackman, studying transportation, R. M. MacIver, political scientist, and Gilbert E. Jackson, who taught economic theory and banking. Innis was given a first year course in the newly established Commerce program called Elements of Commerce, a second year course in Honours English and History which covered eighteenth and nineteenth century economic history and theory, and a third year course for teachers in Economic Theory. Innis also began teaching a night course in economics in Hamilton for the Workers' Educational Association. In 1921 Vincent Bladen from Oxford and C. R. Fay from Cambridge joined the department. In 1922 professor Mavor retired as head and was replaced by R. M. MacIver. Innis threw himself into his career and discovered, to his dismay, the lack of materials from which one could teach an economic history of Canada, a deficiency he immediately sought to redress.

Readers of Creighton's biography may notice that up to Innis's arrival in Toronto, Creighton's style reflected the intimate thoughts of Harold Innis. In fairness, Creighton was using more than historical imagination to reconstruct Innis's interior life. Creighton's story up to the Toronto years was closely based on Harold Innis's own "Autobiography." Innis had dictated his reminiscences while on his sickbed during the summer of 1952. The "Autobiography" is a 127 page double-spaced typescript.[55] According to a note attached by Mary Quayle Innis the account of Innis's life was carried only to 1922 before he became too ill to continue.[56] Working from his letters and memories, Innis left a memoir which Creighton, managing to retain much of the simple charm of Innis's stories, retold. He had to use his own resources to reconstruct Innis's life after 1922 and so the biography retreated from its previous intimacy. After Harold Innis's arrival in Toronto, Creighton's biography becomes more attuned to the parade of events and accomplishments of Innis' professional life, a professional life which overlapped with that of Donald Creighton.

Creighton saw history as a story-telling drama which told of the unique "encounter between character and circumstance."[57] His biography of Innis is the work of a fine story teller, written with personal immediacy. Creighton was close, and no doubt had personal insights into his friend's character, but he did not present the whole picture. Innis possessed a character certainly more cantankerous and complex than Creighton painted. The book's lack of balance has prompted one critic to call it "hagiographic."[58] *Portrait of a Scholar* served Creighton's purpose to create a monument to the memory of Harold Adams Innis. In spite of Creighton's uncritical, memorializing intentions, this book remains the standing authority for Innis's biographical information.[59]

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[55] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /036 (01) "Autobiography."

[56] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /036 (01) Note in the hand of Mary Quayle Innis. n.d.

[57] Donald Creighton, "History and Literature," *Toward the Discovery of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), 19.

While it is true that no one else has published a biography of Harold Innis, other scholars have described his intellectual development. Carl Berger's and Tom Watson's studies, in particular, have much to offer although they are very different in focus and approach. Carl Berger wrote a valuable account of Innis in his definitive study of Canadian historiography, *The Writing of Canadian History.* In his book, Berger investigated major Canadian historians and their writings in English with a mind to understand what those histories said about the historians who wrote them and their times. Berger explained that "the history of history, or historiography, is the historical method turned on itself."[60] In other words historiography looks at the context in which a specific history is written. Although a history is an explanation of the past, influences from the present often invade those explanations.[61] Histories then, may be investigated on two levels — what they have to say about the past and what they have to say about the times and circumstance in which they were written. Berger was interested to see what a survey of English Canadian history had to say about Canada's evolving image of itself.

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[58] Doug Owram, "Intellectual, Cultural, and Scientific History," *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide Volume 2: Confederation to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 175.

[59] Perhaps the most cogent explanation of Innis's contribution to the larger field of communications studies is Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). In his chapter "Metahistory, Mythology, and the Media: The American Thought of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan," Czitrom relies on Creighton's biography for his background on Harold Innis.

[60] Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2nd ed., 1986), x.

[61] Histories, which are obviously distorted by the preoccupations of the times in which they are

Carl Berger explained that the professional study of Canadian history began as a formal academic discipline just prior to the arrival of this century. Critical history began after 1894 when George M. Wrong was appointed to the Chair of History at the University of Toronto and Adam Shortt began lecturing in economic and social history at Queen's University. Prior to academic professionalization, Canadian history had been practiced by "men of letters" with an eye towards self-amusement, memorialization, patriotism and moral lessons. English and German influences were important in the international styles of history. Darwinism influenced the writing of history and analogies were drawn between organic and historical development. "History came to be regarded as the revelation of patterns and uniformities, not merely the record of countless unconnected episodes."[62] The German school of history adopted scientific habits of evidence. Scientific history valued facts before literary style. Leopold von Ranke with his new seminar

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written, are occasionally called "Whig histories." See Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W. H. Norton & Company, reprint of 1965 edition, no date). In an effort to arrive at a more precise view of historical distortion, certain historians have proposed the use of the term "present-centred history," see Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, "Whig History and Present-Centred History," and also, "Present-Centred History and the Problem of Historical Knowledge," *Historical Journal* 31, no. 1 (1988) 1-16 and *Historical Journal* 31, no. 2 (1968) 253-274. Harold Innis referred to this problem as "present mindedness," see William Christian, ed. *The Idea File of Harold Adams Innis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), page 164, note 22.

[62] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 6.

system, a kind of research laboratory for the humanities, and his principle of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*— "as it really was" — won popularity in America between 1880 and 1900. However, critical history was slow to enter Canada where, unlike the United States, there was a pronounced lack of German influence and a preponderance of British. Critical history emphasized "documentation, detachment, specialization, and a scientific frame of mind."[63] Under George M. Wrong's guidance, history at Toronto was based on Oxford for its style and teaching staff. The Oxford style was British, literary and moral rather than scientific. History was practiced as a general explanation of development rather than a specialized investigation. On the other hand, Adam Shortt, from Political Economy at Queen's, followed the German tradition. Political Economy had been part of the Philosophy Department at Queen's since 1878. Shortt was the first Canadian-born economist and he adopted "a historical approach to the Canadian economy," his work coinciding with "a period of intense economic development."[64] Where classical English economists such as Adam Smith felt that there were universal laws which governed economics, German economists felt that there were not laws but specific circumstances of place and time. Shortt's work was in a tradition which emphasized skepticism over theory, stressed the evolutionary nature of institutions, and held that only detailed historical research could provide guidance to public policy.

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[63] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 8.

[64] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 22.

Berger demonstrates that Canadian academic history originated at the confluence of two streams, the British stream which was primarily narrative and more related to literature; and the German stream which was primarily critical and more related to social sciences. A general consensus has since developed on what constitutes professional history. If there is a bias in academic history, it is more important to be exacting in critical methods than in narrative techniques.

Berger explained that the first generation of Canadian historians after World War I were preoccupied with constitutional history, and particularly with the development of "responsible government" in British North America as the critical factor in the political evolution of the Canadian state. The political question of the twenties was concerned with Canada's changing status within the British Empire and these constitutional histories reflected that concern. The constitutional historians were criticized by Frank Underhill who brought a politicized historical analysis to his work. Frank Underhill (1889-1971) was educated at the University of Toronto where he was one of G. M. Wrong's "favourites."[65] He finished his graduate studies at Oxford. Underhill served as a machine gun officer in the British Army in World War I and was wounded in France. After the war, he taught at the University of Saskatchewan and in 1927 joined the University of Toronto where he stayed until 1955. Underhill, following the Oxford tradition, was a skillful stylist. He was also a polemicist and a dynamic speaker. He was a

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[65] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 57.

Canadian nationalist who, based on his war experience, strenuously opposed any Canadian involvement in British entanglements. He was an individualist who supported democratic socialism and the common man. His historical thought was influenced by the American progressive history of Charles A. Beard. "New history" was seen as a tool intended to redress the problems of the present by examining their roots in the past. Underhill took on this research programme as an unrepentant partisan with a gift for incendiary rhetoric. His predilection for "hot gospel" would entangle him in several controversies with his contemporary, Harold Innis.

Berger combined archival research with an analysis of published texts to construct a historiography of the works of Harold Innis. Berger cross-referenced Innis's papers with those of his colleagues, such as Arthur Lower, and with his foes, such as Frank Underhill. He referred to Creighton's biography as a source to cite Creighton's insight as a friend and colleague of Innis. Like Creighton, he relied on the "Autobiography" to describe Innis's early powers of observation and his ability to recognize patterns.

Berger's description of Harold Innis's character agrees with Creighton's on the essential importance of his family background and the influence of the war. He provides some helpful details. The family that Innis was born into was considered to be "hard-shell Baptist," rural and unsophisticated. He wrote that the war wounded Innis's individuality and created a lasting suspicion of authority. Berger cited Innis's discomfort.

> The hated subservience to officers, the detested persistence to obedience to orders, the monotony of the bugle, have all alike

> tended to crush the spirit of independence and individuality which have become so dear to him, since he has been bereft of them.[66]

According to Berger, the war left Innis stronger in his nationalism and in his mistrust of government and bureaucracy. Berger's overall judgment of Innis's character is that it was cast in the pluralist mold of "traditional liberal individualism." He was a Canadian nationalist. He was also a skeptic who practiced an "almost obsessive dedication to scholarship." Innis's writings exercised a "somber determinism" indicating the dominance of the material environment in shaping human affairs.[67]

Innis was a fierce defender of scholarship and the university tradition. This loyalty lead him to attack those who blurred the distinction between the university and political activism. Innis was bitter and "often apocalyptic" in his denunciations. He used resignation or the threat of resignation as a "blunt tactic" to get his way. Berger claims that within Harold Innis's sincere devotion to Canadian scholarship "there was a certain egoism of selflessness."[68] Unlike Creighton, Berger indicated limitations in Innis's character, yet Berger's inclusion of the negative aspects of Innis's character does not subtract from his estimation of Innis's positive contribution to learning. Berger claimed that the central thread which ran through Innis's work was that "to understand limits is to enhance the freedom of the nation and the individual."[69]

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[66] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 86-87.
[67] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 102.
[68] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 108.

Tom Watson in his Political Science doctoral dissertation, "Marginal Man, Harold Innis's Communications Works in Context," claimed that "there is a dark side to Innis's personality."[70] He added, "we find evidence of a recurring and profound sense of depression, anxiety and overwork." Watson asserted that "Innis was not a happy man," and claimed that Harold Innis was a depressive, secretive man who privately judged himself a to be a failure in relation to his personal ambitions. Watson described Innis as a character type of "the intellectually precocious child from a relatively deprived background" who has "a cloying sense of inferiority stemming from the impression of forever having to make up for the lost time of a disadvantaged past."[71] He suggested that Innis suffered from "neurasthenia," a type of nervous disorder, throughout his adult life. Watson deciphered Innis's near illegible correspondence to tease out more details of his life. While his interpretation seems forced and heavy handed to make Innis fit the mold of a particular character type, the depth of Watson's research is peerless. He emphasized the ambition of Innis's mother and highlighted the importance of the family's background in "a white settler colony." Watson unearthed evidence which explained why Innis turned down his family's efforts to have him join the Baptist ministry. Innis had explained to his son "they pushed me too hard and I got suspicious."[72] Watson is decided on the influence of the war. "He went to war as a Christian and colonial and came back as an agnostic and a Canadian."[73] In a fascinating interpretive twist, Watson suggests that the war became Harold Innis's patron. Army savings, disability pensions and other military allowances allowed Innis to finish his M.A. and Ph.D. In Watson's view, Innis in his research programme aspired to "the important role played by peripheral intellectuals with a generalist bent in contributing to Western civilization."[74]

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[69] Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 111.

[70] Watson, "Marginal Man," 4-6

[71] Watson, "Marginal Man," 52.

When Harold Innis arrived at the University of Toronto, the formative experience of youth was behind him. He had absorbed his family values which were hardworking, traditional, and Baptist. He had been a farm boy who grew up working with animals and farm equipment. He had a wide ranging curiosity which he satisfied by observing and recording natural phenomena in his rural environment. Good in school, he was well rewarded by his studies which drew him away from his family and the countryside. McMaster University and living away from home was a difficult adjustment due to lack of money but his love of scholarship prevailed. The war was a shock to Innis's character spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. His wartime experiences heightened his prickly individualism and left him suspicious of orators, social propaganda and the power of the state. Although he set aside his Baptist practices and his Christian faith, he did not set aside associated values and habits. He remained hardworking with a conservative cast of mind, culturally a Baptist, albeit a lapsed Baptist. As a bright rural boy, his interest in economics seemed sensible as it dealt with a variety of concrete things in an intellectually challenging manner which captured his curiosity. If he had been more practical and followed the urging of his family, he could have been a school teacher, a lawyer, or even a preacher. Instead he gambled on his intellectual hunger and doggedly followed his own path. His training at the University of Chicago provided him with the tools to begin his own series of discoveries and he possessed the intellectual audacity to think he could make a difference to scholarship. By the time he arrived at Toronto, the essential foundations of Innis's character had been laid down. This is not to suggest that his character stopped growing — in fact several surprising twists and turns and apparent contradictions surface later in his career — but to suggest that his arrival at the University of Toronto marks the end of his youth. His schooling was complete. With his career as a university teacher established, he was able to attract a wife, start a family, and pick up his adult responsibilities.

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[72] Watson, "Marginal Man," 120.
[73] Watson, "Marginal Man," 24.
[74] Watson, "Marginal Man," 6.

Creighton in his panegyric, Berger in his historiography, and Watson in his political psychobiography all throw different lights onto the character of Innis, yet all agree that his formative experiences had a powerful influence on his work. Harold Innis was a complex man who, in his studies, objected to easy explanations. Perhaps it is not surprising that his character also resists simple explanation. This description of the prevailing influences on the development of Innis's character may help us to understand why Innis would 'attend to the things to which he attended,' in his thought and in his motives. When Harold Innis arrived at the University of Toronto, the bias of his character was well established and his most creative work was yet ahead of him.

Chapter 2

TOOLS AND POLITICS

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,
do it with thy might;
for there is no work, nor device,
nor knowledge, nor wisdom,
in the grave,
wither thou goest.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

I once had to choose between going into university work
or into politics and I decided to go into politics.

Harold Innis
Innis Papers

In 1929 Harold Innis began a torrent of publishing. He became so prolific through the thirties, forties and early fifties, that one wonders about his relative silence during the twenties. Two reasons seem to explain it: his personal research and his professional mission. More will be said later about his research, but for Harold Innis, his professional mission in the twenties was to build the institutions and create the tools which would support the study of Canadian political economy. Political economy suffered from real deficiencies in research, sources and publishing. Innis attacked the problems of sources strategically. Dissatisfied by the lack of teaching materials for Canadian economic history, Innis combed the archives in Ottawa, and enrolled Arthur Lower to help compile a collection of documents useful for research. The first volume of *Select Documents in Canadian Economic History* arrived in 1929 to fill a large gap in primary sources.

Innis saw the value of academic community and he "worked hard" to re-establish the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA) in 1929 as an active collegial group.[1] The association had fallen apart at its inaugural meeting back in 1913, after James Mavor of Toronto and Stephen Leacock of McGill, had fallen prey to hard feelings.[2] Their feud assumed larger institutional dimensions creating difficulty between the Toronto and McGill departments and, as a consequence, the development of professional relations among Canadian political economists was stunted for some time. With the re-establishment of the CPSA safely out of the way, Innis turned his attention to creating a proper journal for the organization.

In 1928, Innis had convinced the University of Toronto Press to publish an annual journal called *Contributions to Canadian Economics.* It was the first social science journal in Canada. According to Vincent Bladen, Innis "foresaw a great stimulus to Canadian research and writing when Canadian Economists had their own journal."[3] President Cody wanted this journal, which Innis edited, to evolve into a quarterly under the auspices of the University of Toronto Press in much in the same fashion as the *Canadian Historical Review.* Innis preferred that the journal serve the discourse of the Canadian Political Science Association and from within his department at Toronto, he enrolled Vincent Bladen's and E. J. Urwick's support for this idea. Middle ground, of a sort, was achieved and in 1935 Vincent Bladen became the first editor of the new quarterly known as the *Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science (CJEPS).* The social sciences had arrived, well and true, in Canada. A vital forum had been created and a new generation of Canadian scholars were poised to make their mark.

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[1] Vincent Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen: Memoirs of a Political Economist* (Toronto: Scarborough College, University of Toronto, 1978), 62.

[2] Ian M. Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto: A History of the Department, 1888–1982* (Toronto: Faculty of Arts and Science, University of Toronto, 1983), 74.

[3] Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen*, 62.

In many ways "The Teaching of Economic History in Canada" (1929) was Innis's bravura début into his academic community.[4] In this address to the National Conference of Canadian Universities, he reported on the state of economic study, as he found it, in the Dominion. This address was also reprinted in the same year in *Contributions to Canadian Economics* which ironically illustrated the point of his article. The study of Canadian economics was so rudimentary that Innis had to first create a journal before he could communicate with his fellow economists on just how rudimentary Canadian economics were.

His address to his colleagues was a proclamation of his research manifesto. The young academic staked out his ideas on the appropriate direction of economic study in Canada. He believed that to construct economic theory was the "central position in economics."[5] However, he also believed that the aspiration towards the theoretical must be balanced by "economic history [which] is always an attempt to test the validity of principles of economic theory and to suggest necessary emendations."[6] Innis regarded history as a test and a corrective of theory, a kind of reality check. He felt that there was much work to do in Canadian economics since British and European models did not explain the dynamics of new countries. He groused that "Canadians are obliged to teach economic theory of old countries and to attempt to fit their analysis of new economic facts into an old background." Even American models of economic development, which ostensibly should be more similar, could not account for the massive government involvement in the development of the Canadian economy. However, Innis noted that "by far the most important work has been done by Canadian students doing graduate work in the United States."[7] Innis called for a philosophy of economic history which could explain the unique development of Canada. "We have been handicapped also by the relatively slow growth of economics and its emergence as a subject separate from history and political science." The study of economics had not yet been clearly teased from the other disciplines of political economy. Innis wanted an economics which could tell the story of Canada's development based on its own experience. In a very real sense, Innis, along with a small handful of others, was pioneering the discipline.

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[4] See Appendix, this thesis, "A Chronology of Major and Selected Works as Published by Harold Adams Innis During his Lifetime," for the chronology and venue of significant and selected writings published during Innis's lifetime. As the bulk of Innis's articles are only easily accessible in special collections, I found re-establishing the strata of significant publications most helpful in reconstructing the sequence of his thinking and in tracking his ideas as they first emerged in print or pronouncement.

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[5] Harold A. Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History in Canada," *Essays In Canadian Economic History*. Edited by Mary Q. Innis, forward by S. D. Clark. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956; reprint 1979). 3. Hereafter *Essays*.

[6] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History in Canada," *Essays*, 3.

[7] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 5.

To take up Innis's comparison, the study of Canadian economics was in the process of emerging from the general area of political economy just as the professional study of Canadian history had emerged a generation earlier. The social sciences after WW I were in a state of change and formulation and among them, a Canadian version of economics was a very junior partner.[8] For these reasons, Innis was ambitious for his discipline. "Economics must be brought level with history and political science and especially with the so-called natural sciences."[9] He also explained the critical value of studying Canadian transportation systems.[10]

> Economists cannot pretend to an understanding of Canadian economic history without an adequate history of transportation. A history of transportation must be accompanied by a history of trade.[11]

Conceptually, Innis divided transportation history into two periods. The first period was dominated by carriers based on water systems. It was succeeded by systems based on land transport. Innis noted that each mode of transportation created characteristic types of development. For example, he claimed that land transport such as the railroad intensified industrialization by launching a self feeding cycle of more industrialism. Industrial equipment needed new raw materials and those raw materials were easily available in the Precambrian Shield. Because North American industrialism needed an effective means to market its products to the "unappreciative consumer" there were implications for modern Canadian economic patterns of growth. He stated that "the rapid rise of advertising has been largely responsible for development of the pulp and paper industry."[12] Innis noted that the need for newsprint to sell products in Chicago or New York caused mill towns to be established on the Canadian Shield.[13] He reviewed the body of Canadian economic literature indicating strengths and weaknesses of various publications. He discussed the state of national, international and provincial archives, and deplored the lack of attention to business records. He chided the libraries "as notoriously delinquent"[14] in their treatment of the economic materials of Canada. He claimed that

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[8] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 6.

[9] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 8.

[10] At this time economists generally considered transportation to be in the same category as communications for the purposes of study.

[11] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 12.

> the study of economic history should enable Canadians to learn to see more clearly the course of the economic growth of Canada and possibly guide it with more intelligence and should aid them in determining their own destinies from an economic point of view.[15]

His guarded suggestion that the study of economics had potential utility should be recognized as a fundamental departure from the noncommittal position he offered in his dissertation. Innis proposed a rigorous curriculum for students of Canadian economics suggesting they would benefit by the study of French, German, Latin, biology, geology, and the applied sciences of electricity, metallurgy and mechanics. Innis hoped that after the "more obvious gaps have been filled," someone would "write a textbook on Canadian economics for use in the secondary schools and the universities."[16] The person who would come to write that first textbook would be his wife, Mary Quayle Innis.

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[12] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 15.

[13] Even before Innis had formalized his staples thesis he was already noting the influence of communications markets on the structure of the Canadian economy.

[14] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 10.

[15] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 15.

Harold Innis met Mary Quayle at Chicago when she was his student in the elementary economics class which he taught as a grad student in 1919.[17] Originally from Wilmette, outside of Chicago, Mary Quayle was returning to finish her last year of university after a stint of wartime work in Washington. Her academic interests were primarily in literature. By spring, Harold Innis and Mary Quayle had formed an attachment to each other. While researching in the archives in Canada, Innis maintained a heartfelt correspondence with her. After his return to Chicago to submit his dissertation and win his doctorate, and after his appointment to the University of Toronto was confirmed, Harold Innis and Mary Quayle announced their engagement. They were married on May 10, 1921 in Otterville. Mary Quayle Innis accompanied her husband to Toronto where they set up a household and began family life. They were to have four children together. Donald was born in 1924, followed by Mary Ellan in 1927,

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[16] Innis, "The Teaching of Economic History In Canada," *Essays*, 16.

[17] Mary Emma Quayle was born in St. Mary's Ohio in 1899. She died in Toronto on January 10, 1972. She received a Ph.B. from the University of Chicago in 1919. Honourary degrees include a LL.D. from Queen's University in 1958, and a D.Litt. from Waterloo University in 1965.

Hugh in 1930 and Anne in 1933. Family life with Harold Innis was punctuated by frequent absences as he travelled extensively to pursue his field research and his career. Mary Quayle managed the family and became a successful writer, publishing stories in magazines, two textbooks, two histories and a novel.

Her work of fiction, *Stand on a Rainbow,* published in 1943, provides some clues to family life with Harold Innis.[18] The novel has strong biographic elements and incorporates certain features of Innis family life. Briefly, the book paints a picture of children and bustling domesticity from a mother's point of view. It is a gentle account of domestic travails and adventure written simply but with a degree of subtlety.

The father figure in the novel is conspicuous by his absence in the family happenings. During a child's music recital, the mother states, "Daddy was so sorry he had to go out of town."[19] During the family's train trip to cottage country:

> "Where's daddy?"
> Arthur had gone back to sit alone several seats behind them on the opposite side of the aisle.
> "Stay here, He's tired and there's only this one car."[20]

While the mother, Leslie waits at the dock alone, fearing the worst because her children are late in returning from boating, she feels that by his absence, her husband Arthur "was safely insulated from the adventures he encouraged."[21] The husband's participation in the family is limited. Ironically this is revealed in an act of generosity when he volunteers to mind the family so that Leslie could get some much needed time out of the house.

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[18] Mary Quayle Innis, *Stand on a Rainbow*, (Toronto: Wm. Collins & Co., 1943).
[19] Quayle Innis, *Stand on a Rainbow*, 218.
[20] Quayle Innis, *Stand on a Rainbow*, 249.

> Arthur had not come home on purpose to let her go out since Miles was a baby and she felt more abashed than pleased by his offer. Nothing she could do was of as much importance as anything Arthur might do.[22]

Anne Innis Dagg, the youngest daughter, has drawn attention to the fact that the father character in her mother's novel shared characteristics with her own father.[23] She recalled that during the summer the family would rent a lakeside cottage called Peter's Finger at Foote's Bay in Muskoka, and in fact the preface for *The Cod Fisheries* (1940) was written and signed from Peter's Finger. She credits her father with sharing his love of nature with his children, especially when he could get away from work for part of the summer. She recalled that her father kept up a crushing schedule which occasionally affected his health. He would arrive at the university first thing in the morning and stay until the afternoon when he returned home for four o'clock tea. He would eat supper with the family for an hour and then return to his study where he would work until ten PM, occasionally breaking to play a few hands of solitaire called "Idiot's Delight."[24] He was very often engaged on business trips and government commissions which kept him away. In the manner of the times, his wife took primary responsibility for raising the family. Yet with Mary Quayle's devotion to literature, combined with her expanding career as a writer, family life may not have been conventional, even for an academic family. Arthur Lower commented that Mary Quayle "was I suppose, an intellectual rather than a housewife."[25] Lower also made a curious observation which he did not elaborate, "Mary was an American and the Innis household, in that respect, resembled an American home rather than a Canadian."

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[21] Quayle Innis, *Stand on a Rainbow*, 276.
[22] Quayle Innis, *Stand on a Rainbow*, 155.
[23] Innis Dagg, "Memories of My Father," 82.
[24] Innis Dagg, "Memories of My Father," 90.

Mary Quayle was a versatile writer who was at home both in fiction and in nonfiction. She worked closely with her husband on *An Economic History of Canada*, which was published in 1935 as the first textbook of Canadian economic history. It was praised by the critics, some of whom made a point of winking at the quiet partnership of the project. Clearly the book was a collaboration, with Quayle imposing her clarity of style and expression over Innis's research and thinking. *An Economic History of Canada*, served an entire generation as their introduction to Canadian economic history. This text may also be read as an *entré* into the economic thought of Harold Innis. After Harold Innis's death, Mary Quayle raised her family and flourished as a writer, also serving as Dean of Women at University College at Toronto from 1955 to 1964.[26] Scholars should note that Mary Quayle played the central role in the posthumous editing and publishing of her husband's writings. She was devoted to keeping his name alive. According to Watson the provenance of Innis's personal papers which were later donated to the University of Toronto Archives, reflects a culling of Innis's correspondence by Mary Quayle. Watson suggests that she had her eye on intemperate remarks which could have reflected poorly on Innis's reputation.[27] Mary Quayle had cause for concern because her husband often found himself embroiled in heated conflict.

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[25] Arthur Lower, "Harold Innis as I Remember Him," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 20 (Winter 1985-89): 6.

[26] As well as short stories and articles published in magazines, her books include the aforementioned titles, *An Economic History of Canada*, (1935) and *Stand on a Rainbow*, (1943). She published her history of the YWCA, *Unfold the Years* in 1949. In 1956 she edited a collection of Innis's work, *Essays in Economic History*. Also in 1956, she published *Traveller's West*, dedicated to H.A.I., a history of expeditions in the Canadian west. In 1966 she published *The Clear Spirit*, a feminist history of twenty individual women. In 1970 she published *Nursing Education in a Changing Society*.

In 1929, in a fit of anger, Innis resigned his teaching position at the University of Toronto. It would seem that Innis's personal style did not meet favour with everyone. The young professor was self assured, perhaps intellectually arrogant. In his first year at Toronto, he had been thought so "radical" that he was withdrawn from teaching a class."[28] He brought a casual American manner to a campus dominated by Oxbridge fashion. Unlike his colleagues, who followed the fashion of the times, Innis refused to wear academic gowns.[29] He did not go through channels but corresponded directly with the President of the University to pass along his personal opinions on the development of a department of Geography at Toronto.

Innis received a promotion to Assistant Professor in 1925 and, by all appearances, his career at Toronto was going well enough until E. J. Urwick became the new Head of the Department of Political Economy. Vincent

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[27] Watson, "Marginal Man," 177, 181.

[28] Innis, "Autobiography," 88.

[29] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /036 (08) Notes in the hand of Mary Quayle Innis. n.d.

Bladen, who observed the drama from inside the department, suggested that Urwick

> could not understand this raw Ontario farm boy who was slugging in the Archives and slugging away up in the Arctic, studying his country and talking such nonsense (as Urwick thought) about economic determinism.[30]

E. J. Urwick, who had recently replaced R. M. MacIver, was an Oxford educated Englishman who was coaxed out of retirement to preside in a political economy department surrounded by other Oxford men. As a consequence of his American training, Innis was an outsider. His Canadian research programme was viewed as peculiar and his style of economic history followed in the American/German tradition rather than the British. While Bladen suggested a culture clash between academic styles, John Watson suggests that the rivalry of office politics played a hand.

Watson describes Gilbert E. Jackson as Innis's "arch rival of the time."[31] Just prior to this controversy, Innis had opposed Jackson's attempts to ease the standards for Commerce and Finance students. As Chair of the Commerce and Finance Committee, Jackson was alarmed by the high failure rate of his students. Innis, on the other hand, saw himself as serving the greater good of economics rather than serving the interests of businessmen who were looking for personnel.

> We cannot afford to sell our national soul to the immediate demands of business....The business man's importance cannot be neglected, but his place must not supersede that of the interests of the country.[32]

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[30] Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen*, 40.

[31] Watson, "Marginal Man," 212.

On this issue, Innis was obdurate, which led to conflict. He must have been a tough, difficult opponent. Witness Urwick's complaint about Innis's behaviour in the standards controversy to President Falconer. "In his criticism of the department, moreover, he is wrong in his facts, mistaken in his inferences, and stupid in his estimate of the position." It is against this background in which events unfolded. Gilbert Jackson, as a senior man in the department, acted as an assistant and advisor to Urwick. They had conferred and, at Jackson's suggestion, determined to promote Hubert Kemp, who was junior to Innis, over Innis's head. Jackson recorded the event. "Looking at the distant future of the department, we could see that some day, Kemp or Innis would become Head of it."[33] Jackson suggested, and Urwick agreed, that Innis was "quite without capacity" in his ability to deal with the administration, while Kemp had a "natural talent." Jackson recommended a round of promotions which would see Kemp become an associate professor and therefore senior to Innis who would be stalled as an assistant professor. Jackson had engineered it so that Kemp would be next in line to become Head. Jackson concluded, and Urwick agreed that this arrangement would allow Innis to devote his time to the rugged scholarship for which he seemed so avid. Innis did not share their opinion of his own best interests and promptly submitted his resignation to take effect at the end of term. He then began an immediate correspondence with D. A. McGibbon at the University

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[32] As cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 229, 232.

[33] Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen*, 41.

of Alberta in search of a position. His anger and pride over this obvious attempt to suffocate his career had provoked Innis to sunder his ties with Toronto.

His resignation had unquestionably placed his young family, which now included two infants, at risk and his prospects were unknown. The irony of an economist looking for work in 1929 cannot go unmentioned. President Falconer, apprised of the situation, put some gentle pressure on Urwick to keep Innis. Innis's colleague, Vincent Bladen, who, like Urwick, was a fellow Oxfordman, took it upon himself to explain Innis to the new Department Head.[34] After these interventions Innis too, was offered a promotion to an associate professorship, and this action had the result of restoring his seniority. Having faced down the Political Economy Department, Innis withdrew his resignation but he was left offended by the episode. He wrote to his wife, Mary Quayle Innis:

> The row is over temporarily and I get my promotion to Associate Professor. I am not particularly pleased with it since it was got by sheer brute strength and I don't think a university should be conducted on that basis. . . . I get hot and cold by turns but you must pay no attention to it. However for the time I am vindicated[35]

Innis's act of resignation demonstrated the courage of wounded pride. From this episode, Innis discovered that resignation, and later on, the mere threat of resignation, was a potent political tool. Over the intervening years Urwick would develop a great deal of respect for the talents of Harold Innis and he actively campaigned to ensure that Innis would follow him as

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[34] Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen*, 40.

[35] As cited by Creighton, *Portrait of a Scholar*, 71.

Department Head.

In 1929, Innis also produced an keystone article which was rich with implications. "The Work of Thorstein Veblen" presented Innis's evaluation of Veblen's contribution to scholarship. This article makes clear Innis's fundamental intellectual debt to Veblen. Innis felt that it was unfortunate that Veblen was best remembered "as the satirist with barbed phrases,"[36] and downplayed Veblen's scathing social criticism which had won him such notoriety in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. For Innis, it was Veblen's attention to the social consequences of technology in which he demonstrated genius.

> The constructive part of Veblen's work was essentially the elaboration of an extended argument showing the effects of the machine industry and the industrial revolution.

Innis wrote that Veblen was the first to attempt to understand the "general tendencies in a dynamic society saddled with machine industry." Innis compared Veblen to Adam Smith. He stated that in the same way that Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, presented a picture of the economy just as it was entering the industrial process, Veblen similarly presented a picture of the economy just as it was currently affected by modern industrialization. Innis gently chided Veblen for attempting "too wide a field," yet underlined that "it is the method of approach which must be stressed, and not the final conclusions." This vigorous championing of Veblen's methodology is indicative of Innis's view that Veblen was on track regarding the influence of technology. Innis held that Veblen "attempted to outline the economics of dynamic change and to work out a theory not only of dynamics but of cyclonics."[37] By simple definition, 'a theory of dynamics' would be a general explanation of change. But what is 'a theory of cyclonics'? With this statement Innis introduced an operating concept which he would develop and refine over the entire course of his work.

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[36] Innis, "The Work of Thorstein Veblen," *Essays*, 22, 23, 25.

"Cyclonics" is a term which has a seemingly familiar ring to the ear but does not appear in the Oxford English Dictionary, so a precise understanding of what Innis meant is elusive. It does not show up as an economic term even in a Canadian economic dictionary.[38] Perhaps the neologism was Innis's own. In contemporary literature, the term "cyclonics" has dropped out of currency and its use is generally restricted as an artifact of Innis's economic thought. However, some reconstruction of what Innis meant by this term is possible. From his footnote we can see that cyclonics are related to "economic storms of new countries."[39] Innis seems to be proposing a model of the economy which had great similarity to weather systems. He suggested that the devastating changes which swept through economies of developing countries were like storms.[40] Innis proposed that the study of cyclonics would help reduce conflicts between established industrialized countries and recently industrializing countries. He stated that it was his intention to incorporate cyclonics into Veblen's method of surveying the effects of the industrial revolution. Innis counted himself among the students of Veblen who would work out and revise his ideas.

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[37] Innis, "The Work of Thorstein Veblen," *Essays*, 26.

[38] David Crane, *A Dictionary of Canadian Economics* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1980).

[39] Innis, "The Work of Thorstein Veblen," *Essays*, 26.

[40] There is a striking similarity between aspects of Innis's "cyclonics" and the recent science of Chaos Theory. Chaos Theory seeks to explain indeterminate change in large systems. Chaos Science found its formulation in the Sixties, and co-incidently it was based on studies of weather systems. Since its formulation, certain economists have attempted to apply principles derived from Chaos Theory to economic phenomenon.

Innis's method of theory construction depended on inductive reasoning which employed the evidence of the historical record. In essence this meant uncovering and studying the evidence to find the implied pattern within. The patterns found in the historical record could suggest economic laws or principles which could then be theorized into an hypothesis and tested against the evidence. For example the staple theory was conceptualized only after Innis recognized parallel patterns of development in the boom/bust growth cycles of Canadian primary resources. On the other hand, he was dismissive of abstract mathematical models in economics. Innis saw the value of history to root economics to the events of the past rather than to purely theoretical models.

> Any substantial progress in economic theory must come from a closer synthesis between economic history and economic theory.[41]

Innis believed that any economics which got too from away from a correspondence to actual historic events lost its value.

While 1929 was a good beginning for Innis's career in publications, it was also the year of the stock market crash and the arrival of the Great Depression. As Canada was dependent on foreign markets for a significant amount of its trade, it was particularly hard hit by the convulsions of the international economy. The Depression was a social calamity which unemployed one third of the Canadian work force. The federal government and the provincial governments of the day were not equipped, nor inclined, to deal with the extensive social consequences of the Depression. These were small governments with limited infrastructure and revenue streams. Without these instruments, governing politicians resisted providing welfare programs for as long as they could.

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[41] Innis, "The Work of Thorstein Veblen," *Essays*, 26.

With a perceived failure of government and increasing strains in the social order, new political movements were born. The Social Credit Party, which emerged in Alberta, found inspiration in the monetary theories of C. H. Douglas and the evangelical radio talents of William Aberhart. In Saskatchewan, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was founded when British-style labour socialism and the social gospel of J. S. Woodsworth were synthesized to act as the voice of farmers and workers. In Quebec, Maurice Duplessis formed the heart of the Union Nationale. This party was originally formed as a progressive opposition to the provincial Liberals but later embraced nationalist and arch-conservative sentiments. Quebec also saw the rise of nativistic groups led by individuals prominent in the Church. The Ku Klux Klan had already surfaced as a temporary force in Saskatchewan politics. The Communist Party was outlawed and activists surfaced in other "Workers" organizations, particularly those in relief camps. New parties had fervent appeal because the failure of the existing system was incontrovertible. Hundreds of municipalities and the Western provinces went broke trying to provide relief to the indigent before the Federal government gingerly advanced to occupy a larger role in the Canadian economy.

Both the Conservative and Liberal federal governments of the Depression entertained a real fear of social disorder. Unemployment Relief Camps which had been created for homeless men had served to concentrate the disenfranchised. In June of 1935, jobless men in the West boiled out of the work camps in anger, ungrateful for their twenty cents a day, vowing to ride the rails to take their complaints to Conservative Prime Minister R. B. Bennett in Ottawa. Many of these men were veterans of the trenches in France. Starting in British Columbia, over 1,000 men hopped the eastbound freight trains heading to the seat of government. The "On to Ottawa Trek" was derailed in Regina, when Prime Minister Bennett ordered the RCMP to disperse the protest and arrest the leaders. During the ensuing melee, a city police officer was killed and scores of rioters and police were injured. There were over 100 arrests. The Regina Riot of June 3, 1935 is perhaps the most vivid example of the ongoing social tensions of the Depression but it is by no means the only example.

These escalating social tensions and the struggle to address them created hot political debates. A large part of the Canadian debate was between those who felt that the state should expand in its efforts to take care of the needy, and opponents to that idea, who would rather see market forces prevail. The reigning dispute was between socialist and conservative views of the proper role of the state apparatus. The socialists wished to expand the scope of the state and conservatives opposed this idea. Academics in the universities, as well as the people on the street, were consumed by these ideas. An unprecedented debate over the expansion and proper role of government was occurring in the body politic.[42]

Because the Great Depression was at heart a financial crisis, a great deal of pressure was placed on economists and other social scientists to come up with cures for the crisis. Innis viewed this impulse with suspicion. He entertained a dissenting skepticism about the abilities of Canadian economists to act as social planners. His position as a leading Canadian economist in Toronto gave him a bully pulpit for his views.

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[42] Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

If the year of the crash marked a breakthrough for Innis, it was in the very next year that his reputation as a leading scholar was created with the publication of *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930). *The Fur Trade* is, at heart, a masterful description of an intricate ecological system. In this book, Innis débuted as a mature economic historian in style and method. His ability to sustain a long and coherent story had greatly improved over his thesis. He told a story of the fur trade in which the land, the waterways, the beaver, the native peoples, and the Europeans were all active participants in a complex web of economic, technological and social interaction.

In *The Fur Trade* Innis continued his study of the relationship between transportation technology; economic development, and society. In keeping with the style of his dissertation, Innis made his arguments with a mass of detail. However, rather than opening with a description of the land, as he did in *The CPR* he began with a natural history of the beaver. In his description of fur as a staple good, he interwove a theory of development. He described fur as a staple good attached to a web of relationships. Factors of geographic setting, trading cultures, technological adaptation, and lines of communication were introduced and articulated. Innis created a panoramic view of the historical process. He painted a large canvas of the fur trade which extended from Europe through to the reaches of North America for some three hundred years, supported by the minute details of his primary research. The explanations of relationships, joined by cause and effect, no longer appear tacked on to the conclusion, but are embedded in the course of his narrative and rise naturally from the dynamics he illustrates.

Native transportation and provisioning technologies were at the root of the European trading systems in North America, adopted first by the French and subsequently by the English.[43] Innis described the competition between the North West Company (NWC) and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) as a competition between two kinds of business entities, two kinds of transportation techniques, and two distinct water systems; the St. Lawrence versus the Hudson Bay. Innis recognized that the NWC communications system was based on the ability of the canoe to penetrate through the interlinked water systems of the Pre-Cambrian Shield. On the other hand the HBC had the advantage of sailing directly into Hudson's Bay with ocean-going ships. After the amalgamation of the rivals, the voyageur route was abandoned as inefficient, and the canoe was replaced by the York boat on the prairie rivers. Innis suggested that transportation systems were an agent of historical change, noticing that replacing prevailing transportation technologies created storms in culture.

With *The Fur Trade,* Innis presented a novel series of conclusions about the fundamental nature of Canada. He argued that the fur trade was the first principle of the Canadian developmental pattern. He stated that "La Vérendrye laid down the boundary of Canada in search for the better beaver of the northern areas."[44] Innis claimed that the roots of Canada were found in one fur trade company: "The Northwest Company was the forerunner of the present confederation."[45] He claimed that the modern pattern of economic development had historical precedent. "In eastern Canada industrialism was following the path of the fur trade."[46] He argued, "it is no mere accident that the present Dominion coincides roughly with the fur-trading areas of northern North America."[47] Innis explained that the fur trade economy which led to the development of Canada was determined by geography. Hence his famous retort to the continentalists who insisted that a north-south flow was more natural to North America than the east-west flow of Canada: "The present Dominion emerged not in spite of geography but because of it."

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[43] Innis, *FurTrade*, 389.
[44] Innis, *FurTrade*, 118.
[45] Innis, *FurTrade*, 392.
[46] Innis, *FurTrade*, 337.

Innis's study of the railway was a brute mass of historical facts. In *The Fur Trade,* Innis advanced his explanatory tools as an economist. Like his former professor, W. S. Wallace, he believed history was best explained in terms of economic activity.

> Agriculture, industry, transportation, trade, finance, and governmental activities tend to become subordinate to the production of the staple for a more highly specialized manufacturing community.[48]

Innis placed paramount significance on economic process. This is why his histories were so little concerned with individuals, politics, and government. He viewed processes not people. He was tracking large economic systems which defined empires and civilizations. He thought that the flow of power in empires could be tracked by following the staple goods commanded from the fringes of empire. This method of analysis foreshadowed his later work in communications, in which Innis suggested that empire was defined by the circulation patterns of media. He stated that as a creature of French, then British imperialism, "Canada has remained fundamentally a product of

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[47] Innis, *FurTrade*, 392, 393.
[48] Innis, *FurTrade*, 385.

Europe."[49] Canada's position created some special problems. "The economic history of Canada has been dominated by the discrepancy between the centre and the margin of western civilization."[50] The Canadian margin was the special circumstance which demanded a native economic history to explain patterns specific to Canada's development. He noted the inextricable relationship between the growth of a strong centralized Canadian government and the development of railway transportation systems.[51] However, he thought that the development of the railroads and capitalism served to mask Canada's inherent geographic unity.[52]

Ultimately, for Harold Innis, the study of the Canadian fur trade represented a case study on the nature of civilization.

> Fundamentally the civilization of North America is the civilization of Europe and the interest of this volume is primarily in the effects of a vast new land area on European civilization.[53]

Innis saw his research demonstrating the economic means by which civilization was extended into Canada.

In the concluding pages of *The Fur Trade in Canada*, Innis outlined the exhaustive research programme which would occupy him for the next decade. With the examination of fur completed, he flagged other primary resources for painstaking description. Innis proposed a study of staple goods which included timber, wheat, pulp and paper, ore, fish, and the respective transportation and communications systems each staple required. It was a programme he would exhaust in 1940 with the publication of *The Cod Fisheries.*

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[49] Innis, *FurTrade*, 401.
[50] Innis, *FurTrade*, 385.
[51] Innis, *FurTrade*, 396.
[52] Innis, *FurTrade*, 402.
[53] Innis, *FurTrade*, 383.

During the twenties, Innis had already plunged into extensive field research in primary resources. By Innis's example, good researchers spent time in the field as well as in the archives. Apparently, Innis had to see things first hand to help him to work out his own ideas.[54] By getting on the ground, looking at a site, and talking to people, Innis got a personal feel for an industry which was just not available in the records. For Innis, this meant a lot of travel at his own personal expense since there was no funding for Canadian scholarship. He visited the mines, lumber mills, pulp mills, and hydro plants of Canada, and then went to the archives to master the details. He began his field research rather dramatically in 1924, by canoeing a long stretch of the Mackenzie River system to research the fur trade. In 1926, he went to the Yukon to study mining. In 1927 he travelled to the East coast to look at mining and paper mills. In 1928 he travelled through Northern Ontario looking at the mines and pulp mills as well as looking at grain elevators in Port Arthur. By 1930, when *The Fur Trade* was published, Innis had, by his own field work, assembled a working picture of Canada's primary resource economy. All that waited was his systematic description of the staples outstanding on his list.

The Fur Trade had an enormous impact on the preoccupations of Canadian historians. Innis wedded two simple ideas into a powerful new thesis which could explain Canada's past and present. The significance given to staples was by no means unique to Innis, as other Canadian economists of the period were drawn to natural resources. Robin Neill suggests that James

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[54] UTA Innis Papers. Audio tape not catalogued. Irene Biss Spry interview with Paul Kennedy. Tape 1.

Mavor, C. F. Fay and even Gilbert Jackson all did some important work in developing the staples concept.[55] Innis himself, credited W. A. Mackintosh from Queen's, with arousing his interest in export staples at a public talk given in Ottawa. However in Macintosh's recollection "Innis clearly exaggerated the influence of this lecture on his own thought."[56] Mackintosh's generosity towards Innis should not detract from Macintosh's key role in identifying staples as a fruitful avenue into the study of the Canadian economy.

Innis's breakthrough was not in the study of staple goods, *per se*, but in the study of staple goods paired with the study of respective transportation systems. Back at Chicago, C. S. Duncan had prompted Innis to pay careful attention to the "relationship between the physical characteristics of a commodity and the marketing structure built up in relation to it."[57] During work on his dissertation, Innis noticed that the underlying pattern of Canadian development had been formed on water systems. In 1927 British author Marion Newbigin published a book called *Canada: the Great River* in which she proposed the idea that the St. Lawrence River and the Pre-Cambrian Shield were central to Canadian history. Innis agreed with this premise, and further to it, was already examining the limits of capacity based on river transportation systems. By taking the idea of staples a little farther to recognize the reciprocal influence between transportation systems and staples, Innis created a dynamic model of economy. At heart, the staples thesis is the simple pairing of two ideas — natural goods and their transportation systems.

The Fur Trade deeply impressed Canadian historians with its power, its sweep, and its economic arguments. Innis won a significant following to his way of looking at the Canadian past. Canadian historians began to volunteer their own versions of the staples research programme and Innis soon found himself at the centre of a school of thought. By the criteria of his ability to enroll colleagues in his research project, the decade of the thirties was Harold Innis's most influential.

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[55] Neill, *A New Theory of Value*, 39.

[56] W. A. Mackintosh, "Innis on Canadian Economic Development," *The Journal of Political Economy* 61 reprint (June 1953): 187.

[57] Innis, "Autobiography," 125.

In the thirties his papers covered diverse themes; in transportation, staples, politics and economic theory. Innis stated the idea that transportation in Canada had "peculiar characteristics" which had direct "relationships to Canadian development." He emphasized that changes in transportation technologies were "responsible for rather violent fluctuations in economic development through the dependence on staple raw materials."[58] Changes in types of transportation created economic storms in the Canadian economy. Innis noticed that railroads, which were developed for the transportation of wheat, led to the development of the mining industry.[59] He suggested that economic exchange had the ability to reveal the character of civilization and wrote that "The fur trade of the North American continent was an index of wide movements."[60]

In "The Canadian Economy and the Depression" (1934) Innis concluded that "we are faced with the far reaching results of modern industrialism." This had important consequences because, "the trend of industrialism has strengthened the trend of nationalism."[61] He claimed that World War I contributed to technological development in power sources, such as hydro electric power, and in transportation, such as the airplane.

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[58] Innis, "Transportation in Canadian Economic History," *Essays*, 74-75.

[59] Innis, "Government Ownership and the Canadian Scene," *Essays*, 88.

[60] Innis, "Interrelations between the Fur Trade of Canada and the United States," *Essays*, 106.

[61] Innis, "The Canadian Economy and the Depression," *Essays*, 123.

These developments introduced a new round of industrialization which promoted nationalism in the competition for resources. Industrialism in turn promoted urbanization. He turned to the theme of communications.

> Improved communication such as the press and the radio...tend to stress similarities of language and ideas. Expansion of the pulp and paper industry has supported intensive advertising and revolutions in marketing essential to demands of the city. It has coincided with the decline of editorials and freedom of speech, and the emergence of headlines and the modern newspaper with its demands for excitement, including wars and peace, to appeal to a large range of lower mental types. The coincidence with the advent of radio dictatorship in Russia, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, the United States, or Canada is not accidental. Mechanization, moreover implies more effective utilization of physical force. Machine guns are effective keys to the city.[62]

This is a remarkable passage for several reasons. It is one of the first places in which Innis began to work out his ideas on the influence of the communications process. Innis discovered a series of interconnected phenomena. He noted how the application of modern technology to communications, in the press and the radio, actually changed the use of language and ideas. He highlighted the economic relationship between the staple of pulp and paper and the commercialism of advertising and marketing. He charged that the emphasis on commercialism leads newspapers, in search of broader appeal, to sensationalism and the debasement of the public discourse. He also noted that radio, as a tool, seemed coincident with dictatorship and hot rhetoric; and Hitler, Mussolini, and Bible Bill Aberhart seem implicated. As well as recognizing the powerful economic influence of modern media, Innis suggested that the impact of new media was to undermine the social order. In Innis's view populations were being held hostage by the technologies of power, physical and intellectual. This passage also suggests the uneasy tone of background menace which percolated through the Depression until the explosion of war in 1939.

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[62] Innis, "The Canadian Economy and the Depression," *Essays*, 127.

In May of 1935, on a spring day in Kingston, at the Meeting of the Learned Societies hosted by Queen's University, Harold Innis and Frank Underhill were witnessed in a "furious argument."[63] Innis was taking angry exception to a paper Underhill had just delivered to the Learneds and, to be sure, Underhill's paper, "The Conception of a National Interest," was designed to make people sit up and take notice.

By the beginning of the thirties, Frank Underhill, and F. R. Scott formed a creative partnership which would challenge government inaction during the Depression. As mentioned, Frank Underhill taught a socially engaged variety of history at the University of Toronto. His friend, F. R. Scott, was a bit of a patrician from high Anglican Montreal. Perhaps more a poet at heart, Scott found his livelihood as a very capable professor of constitutional law at the University of McGill in Montreal. Underhill and Scott were instrumental in forming a coalition of socially concerned intellectuals into an organization called the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR). Other members included Graham Spry, King Gordon, and Eugene Forsey. The LSR was critical of the pitfalls of unfettered capitalism and proposed social democratic alternatives. Underhill and Scott had helped write the Regina Manifesto for the birth of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1933. *Social Planning for Canada,* published by F. R. Scott in 1935, contained a powerful critique of laissez-faire capitalism.

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[63] D. C. Masters, *Henry John Cody: An Outstanding Life* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995), 205. Masters was an eye witness and recorded the exchange in his diary. See his note 49, p. 331.

In Kingston, Frank Underhill had launched a scathing attack on academics who sat back doing nothing to help end the Depression. He said that social scientists must promote social justice. He compared capitalism to an automobile. In Underhill's analogy, historians and political scientists were the front windows, economists were the mechanics, and the capitalists took all the benefits of this vehicle. The depth of his outraged reaction suggests that Innis had more than an intellectual difference with Underhill's characterization. Innis seemed personally insulted by the slander that economists were "the garage mechanics of capitalism." Innis was appalled by Underhill's clarion cry for academic activism. Innis and Underhill were to be locked in a public and personally bitter feud for the remainder of the Depression.

Carl Berger has suggested that F. R. Scott's poem "To Certain Friends," may have been written with reference to Harold Innis.[64] There seems a resonant correspondence between Innis's character and the subject of the poem. Scott brought a perceptive intelligence to his poet's eye and when he wrote social satire his indictments were powerful and damning. Scott begins this poem with a suggestion that his personal social activism prompts a skeptical bemusement among certain friends who do not share his cause.[65] He characterizes these people, despite their knowledge, as "believing, in unbelief."

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[64] Carl Berger in ***The Writing of Canadian History*** suggests that in this poem F. R. Scott "might have had Innis in mind." p. 111.

> They show great zeal collecting the news and statistics.
> They know far more about every question than I do,
> But their knowledge of how to use knowledge grows smaller and smaller.

Scott charged that "they" hid behind the "virtue of having an open mind." "They" suffered a "drought of the will." Paralyzed in their ability to take action, "they" prefer to gather facts rather than making difficult moral choices. As a consequence:

> They will grow old seeking to avoid conclusions,
> Refusing to learn by living, to test by trying,
> Letting opportunities slip from their tentative fingers,

This poem mounts a forceful attack upon a certain habit of mind which Innis emphatically proclaimed as a virtue — his need to keep the question open. Bladen recalls Innis saying, "if the social scientist is certain he is right, he is almost certainly wrong."[66] It was Innis's predilection to believe that problems should be exhaustively researched to be understood, and even then he didn't think that questions could be permanently answered. Innis felt that Underhill was pushing solutions before he understood the problem. Underhill felt that Innis was an ivory tower academic who not only washed his hands of social problems but attacked anyone who didn't do the same.

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[65] F. R. Scott, "To Certain Friends," (1938). *Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966), 44.

[66] Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen*, 46.

Innis, like the character in the poem, tried to "avoid conclusions" in his thinking. Innis's grasp of his own project left him unable to make pronouncements, except to preach against preaching. For Scott and the activists in the LSR, Innis's attitude was unaccountable and indefensible, and courted great social risk. Scott's barbed conclusion embedded this point.

> Till one day, after the world has tired of waiting,
> While they are busy arguing the obvious,
> A half-witted demagogue will walk away with their children.

This is devastating criticism, heartfelt and powerful. However, by Innis's own judgment, Frank Underhill was a fanatic. In private he wrote, "it is difficult to avoid regarding Underhill as a traitor ready to sell us out to any bidder, even to a third party."[67] Innis's public reaction to Underhill was framed in language from Innis's religious past. Underhill was a "hot gospeller." For the most part Canadian Baptists had been a dour lot, but every now and then charismatic preachers would come through on the evangelical circuit to lead an emotional outpouring of religious passion, and then move on to the next gathering. Obviously, Innis counted Underhill among this breed. There is a curious subtext to this struggle for the soul of the nation. Canadians all, Underhill, Spry, Gordon, Forsey, and Scott, brought back their socialism from Oxford and England. Innis came back from Chicago, USA.

Innis's conservative attitude on the proper role of academics did his standing no harm amongst the university leadership. In fact Innis's opinions on this matter were a close reflection of the attitudes of Toronto's President

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[67] Letter from Innis to Irene Biss (Spry), as cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 156.

Cody and the Board of Governors. Universities were kept on a short leash by politicians who reacted angrily when they felt academics were straying into politics and University presidents were expected to police the behaviour of their faculty. As mentioned earlier, Innis was withdrawn from teaching a class in his first year at Toronto because of his 'radicalism,' but since that episode he had posed no further problems for the administration. As seen with the Underhill episode, Innis was energetic in trying to dampen political behaviour among faculty.

Innis directed a steady barrage of correspondence to the various presidents at Toronto. He developed a particularly close relationship with President Cody, whose Toronto tenure overlapped much of Innis's own.[68] Even before Innis was appointed a full professor in 1937, he was recognized as "exercising a powerful influence on university policy in the whole field of the social sciences."[69] Observers report that Cody and Innis shared a close professional relationship. In 1935 Innis had convinced Cody to appoint Griffith Taylor at Chicago to lead Toronto's expanding Geography Department. Taylor had met Innis's approval because Taylor was a top scholar whose concept of Geography reflected his Australian background and marginal orientation to empire. As had been anticipated by Urwick and Jackson in 1929, Innis finally ascended to Head of the Department of Political Economy when President Cody offered the position to Innis in 1937. Innis was next in line and his reputation "brought immense luster" to the Department and the University.[70] Cody had good reasons to welcome the appointment of Innis who was a strong ally of his own positions on many public issues.

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[68] Masters, *Henry John Cody*, 208.
[69] Masters, *Henry John Cody*, 196.

Innis's appointment was not without its detractors. He was the first Canadian Head of the Department and that was not an advantage. As well "he was thought by some to lack the style expected of a department head in a great university."[71] Innis has been described as socially awkward by his children, and physically clumsy by his friends.[72] He was not given to care about his apparel. Lower observed that "Innis's clothes invariably looked as if they had been slept in." He had long bangs which would fall carelessly over the receding hairline on his high forehead. He remained resolutely unvarnished. There was controversy regarding his style of leadership. By many reports, Jackson's initial impressions of Innis's unsuitability for administrative tasks held to be valid. Although Jackson maintained his implacable hostility to Innis's appointment, Urwick had changed his mind about Innis, and as the departing Head of Political Economy, Urwick actively supported Innis as his successor. The official history of the Political Economy Department describes Innis's administrative leadership rather circumspectly drawing on the comments of former members. Gilbert Jackson, although no longer associated with the department, wrote that Innis "literally recoiled from administrative problems and was quite without capacity to deal with them."[73] Vincent Bladen, Innis's friend and successor as Chairman of the Department more generously recorded that Innis possessed "academic 'statesmanship' and leadership which transcended 'administration.'" Bladen claimed that Innis skillfully sensed and diffused potential crises. Alexander Brady suggested that if the department functioned, it was because Innis "delegated everything." It appears that Innis was much more concerned with high issues of scholarship rather than an even paper flow through the Department of Political Economy.

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[70] Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto*, 81.

[71] Masters, *Henry John Cody*, 208-209.

[72] Lower, "Harold Innis as I Remember Him," 8, 6.

Assuming the Headship when he did was by no means easy. Resources were scarce during the Depression, during the war, and during the immediate post war period. The faculty, who were poorly paid before Innis became Head, fell further behind in purchasing power during his tenure. There was no money for raises and Innis developed a reputation for parsimony. It would seem he viewed scholarship as a calling and not a means of worldly enrichment. The department, which was stifled by the Depression, was massively depopulated by WW II, but with war's end exploded with new enrollment. This would have been a challenge for the most able of administrators let alone one whose primary interests were elsewhere. Among certain quarters, Innis's style of leadership led to problems with staff morale. Stephen Hart, who was a member of the Department, reflected on Vincent Bladen's lot under Innis. "You undertake again the thankless tasks of retrieving Innis' mistakes" in an environment where "the chill 'always belittlin' hand of past and present Baptism [is] constantly present to cramp the soul."[74] Hart found that the Political Economy Department at 237 Bloor Street West was characterized by:

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[73] Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto*, 82.

> absorption in the self; gloom; introversion, protestant ethic rampant; denigration; withdrawal into private worlds; administrative anarchy; back-stabbing; log-rolling; nepotism; cliquism, neurotic prima donnae, student discontent; ulcers.

Not all shared Hart's opinion that morale was "lousy" and Vincent Bladen remained an admirer of Innis despite Innis's deathbed lobbying that S. D. Clark, rather than Bladen, should become the next Head of the department. Innis had deeply loyal supporters, but it seems evident that strains ran under his administration in some quarters. If Hart is to be believed, it is fascinating how much of his criticism is tied into the religious stereotype of the dour, ascetic Scottish Baptist.

Along with new responsibilities as Head, Innis maintained his prodigious output of publications. In "An Introduction to Canadian Economic Studies" (1937) Innis characterized the economic relationships within a civilization as the relationship between metropolitan and frontier regions.[75] He noted that Canadian economic activity was reorienting itself towards the United States and he re-emphasized that point in "Significant Factors in Canadian Development" (1937). "The pull to the north and south has tended to become stronger in contrast with the pull east and west."[76]

"The Penetrative Powers of the Price System" (1938) was a major statement of his evolving analysis. It is a complex, meandering discussion of economics in which, among other things, Innis explained economic transitions from feudalism to mercantilism, and finally to capitalism by the influence of the price system. Heavy industry based on coal was termed paleotechnic and lighter industry based on hydro or gasoline was termed neotechnic. According to Innis, the neotechnic phase created new urban centralization and expanding mechanization while disrupting economies based on previous technologies.[77] Innis wrote that "economists have reflected the confusion introduced by the machine industry."[78] His linkages between kinds of technology and concomitant societies had become more clearly identified.

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[74] Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto*, 86, 87.

[75] Innis, "An Introduction to Canadian Economic Studies," *Essays*, 172-175.

[76] Innis, "Significant Factors in Canadian Development," *Essays*, 209.

One week after Germany invaded Poland, and with a respectable interval following Britain's declaration of war, Canada, by her rights as an independent dominion of the Commonwealth, declared war on September 9, 1939. Once again Canada would stand with Britain and France in a European battleground. But this time Innis, who was now 45, would sit the war out. He still carried powerful feelings about his wartime experiences, and he shied away from wartime involvement. As a veteran he was hostile to wartime bureaucracy. However, he used his networking skills to help place people in various government agencies. Many academics left the university to work on the war effort. Innis made a point of remaining in the university and protecting its interests. The war had depopulated the classroom as well as the faculty club and only bare bones programs were maintained. Innis fought with passion to keep programs running during the war, battling with war bureaucrats who could not see the use of liberal education to the war effort, believing that total war demanded total resources for the state[illegible]

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[77] Innis, "The Penetrative Powers of the Price System," *Essays*, 263.

[78] Innis, "The Penetrative Powers of the Price System," *Essays*, 272.

It was under the shadow of the war in 1940 that Innis finally published his largest study. The book was called *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* and, as the subtitle indicates, Innis continued to be preoccupied with mapping the power of large economic systems which drew products from British North America.

> In a region with the extensive waterways which characterize the northern part of North America economic development is powerfully directed toward concentration on staples for export to more highly industrialized regions.[79]

In Innis's determination, the happenstance of geography assigned Canada the role of provider of natural resources to dominant economies.

> It is not too much to say that European civilization left its impress on North America through its demand for staple products and that these in turn affected the success of empires projected from Europe.[80]

Europe molded North America by its markets which drew upon the natural resources needed to maintain empire. Innis explained that this work in the cod fishery was a logical extension of the work he did on the fur trade. His interest was to determine how the fishing industry structured "the economic, political, and social organization of North America and Europe." As with *The Fur Trade*, Innis began with an ecological foundation describing, in this case, the biology of the cod. Again, he carefully reconstructed an evolving international economic system based on a single staple. The scope of *The Cod Fisheries* is epochal, dealing with mercantile empires and monopolies of England, France, Portugal, Spain and Holland spanning some five hundred years of fishing off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. Innis noticed how the demands of differing technologies influenced rival fishing strategies. Differing techniques of fish curing had direct consequences on trade patterns. Mediterranean empires, which had a steady supply of salt, could take "green" cod, while Britain, not having the climate for solar salt, had to make landfall in order to dry the fish instead. However this penalty ultimately led to advantage because dry cod, by its durability, was more marketable and supported British Imperialism in the far flung colonies. To follow Innis's web of connections, the British settlement in Newfoundland is the result of a lack of salt.

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[79] Harold A. Innis. *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy*. Forward by James T. Shottwell, revised edition by Mary Q. Innis, S. D. Clark and W. T. Easterbrook. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1940. Revised ed. 1954, reprint, 1978), ix. Hereafter *Cod Fisheries*.

[80] Innis, *Cod Fisheries*, ix.

The Cod Fisheries is an account founded on the minutiae of archival business ledgers. Among the masses of facts and statistics, he discovered a another environmental factor at work. In his work on the fur trade he had found that rivers acted as centralizing influences on civilization. When he turned his attention to the fishery off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, Innis found that the ocean was a different kind of environment. Innis got stuck, unable explain the dynamics of the fisheries. This caused delays in the manuscript which he was writing for the Carnegie series on the United States and Canada. James T. Shotwell, the chief editor, provided assistance in the person of A. E. McFarlane who edited the sprawling manuscript into shape. Innis refers to his conceptual difficulty in a letter he wrote to Shotwell.

> The problem of the whole volume has been partially psychological since it meant a complete break from the analysis on which I have spent so much time in the fur trade. As an Upper Canadian I understood the St. Lawrence and have lived through and felt its powerful centralizing tendencies. It was consequently much more difficult to escape from the St. Lawrence and to appreciate the decentralizing tendencies of the maritimes. The readjustment involved a terrific amount of difficulty on all sides. I venture this explanation by way of apology for the lengths of time which it took and for the burden

> it has imposed on you and McFarlane. I am afraid I should describe both of you as midwives but for whom this idea would never have been born. . . I am tremendously grateful in that I have survived and in that I see the Canadian problems in a much clearer light than would otherwise have been possible.[81]

Innis had been unable to explain the dynamic of the fisheries with the paradigm he had developed for the fur trade, which was that water systems were centralizing. He had to set the old explanation aside before he could come up with a new one. Interestingly, he did not reject the old explanation as much as he reversed it to its polar opposite. As rivers, water systems were centralizing because they were defined by channels which had to be followed; but as oceans, water systems promoted decentralization because there were no channels which could be followed. The ocean over the Grand Banks of Newfoundland acted to disperse authority, rather than concentrate it. The environment of the ocean had opposite social influences to the environment of the river. This was a neat solution to Innis's conceptual difficulty as it not only served to explain his current study but it reinforced the argument of his previous study. Innis had created a continuum in which the environment at one end of the pole was centralizing and at the other end was decentralizing. There is an elegant symmetry in this model of environmental dialectics.

In *The Cod Fisheries* Innis replayed the methodology he developed in *The Fur Trade*, which was to select a staple good and exhaustively examine its history in the economy. Although *The Cod Fisheries* had better editorial support, it did not seem to capture the academic imagination with the same enthusiasm as *The Fur Trade*. No doubt the timing of the publication was poor. *The Fur Trade* was released during the Depression and for that reason perhaps, experienced less competition for attention, while *The Cod Fisheries* was released during the clamour and mobilization of WW II. *The Cod*

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[81] Letter from Innis to James T. Shotwell, as cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 329.

Fisheries was his last major study of a staple and it was his last big topic book. After *The Cod Fisheries* Innis changed his research strategy and his methodology. He abandoned the publication of painstaking primary research. He learned how to generalize without buttresses of facts.

Between the publication of *The Fur Trade* in 1930 and the publication of *The Cod Fisheries* in 1940, Innis spent the decade in an exhaustive, study of the staple trade. In the conclusion of *The Fur Trade* Innis had proposed a study of Canadian staples which included timber, wheat, pulp and paper, ore, and fish. Innis would systematically publish through this list. In 1932 he first published on the fishery. He published on fur again in 1933. He published on mining in 1936 and he published on dairy in 1937. He published on lumber in 1938 and he published on wheat in 1939. *The Cod Fisheries,* coming in 1940, signaled the conclusion of his research project. He would only publish one more article on staple goods and that was an article on mining in 1941. It was an ambitious body of work. His two big books were the brackets of his research which enclosed the articles between. Curiously, the only staple missing from this list was pulp and paper. This is significant as pulp and paper was crucial to the fundamental reorientation of Innis's research programme.

In reflecting over his life, Innis noticed that his major works seemed to co-incide with the arrival of decades. *The CPR* in 1920, *The Fur Trade* in 1930, and *The Cod Fisheries* in 1940. In the twenties and thirties he had been among the most active institution builders in Canadian letters. He had published three substantial works of research and dozens of articles and addresses. He was the Head of the most important Political Economy Department in the country. He was the leading writer and thinker on Canada's past. He knew all the right people and his influence in the Social

Sciences was ubiquitous. He was reaching the heights of his powers, influence, and reputation. With staples complete, Innis would elaborate on other themes that he had also developed in the thirties. He would continue to develop his ideas on the Canadian economy, communications media, general principles of economics, governance, and American influence. He would also pick up new themes which included democracy, culture, the role of the university, the importance of Classical Greek thought, the press and publishing, the church, propaganda, time and space, law and constitutions, empire, and the threat of American imperialism to Canada. Innis's change of focus seems at once perplexing and intriguing. His future programme would be poorly received and would cost him the interest of colleagues who had previously followed his leading research. As a consequence, the thirties would stand as Harold Innis's most magnificent. By that decade's end it would be recognized that Innis possessed superb intellectual tools and that he employed his personality in passionate political beliefs.

Chapter 3

CIVILIZATION

And so we entered the open seas of democracy in the twentieth century with nothing to worship but the totalitarianism of the modern state.

Harold A. Innis, 1945
"An Economic Approach to English Literature
in the Nineteenth Century"

In April of 1939, George Drew, leader of the opposition and future premier, stood in his place in the Ontario Legislature to launch a stinging attack on Frank Underhill. Drew quoted from a publication in which Underhill had advised Canadians to "thumb their noses" at British militarism and avoid being "shot down ... in meaningless slaughter."[1] These sentiments, written four years earlier in peacetime, looked next to seditious with their publication on the eve of war in 1939. Premier Mitch Hepburn, not to be outdone in political theatrics, called for Underhill's dismissal from the provincially funded university. This attack was met by a groundswell of support for Underhill by faculty and students who signed petitions in his favour. On April 19, Underhill was summoned to the Board of Governors to explain himself. Underhill had the support of senior academics who were also in attendance, including President Cody, Chester Martin, W. P. M. Kennedy, Dean Beatty, and Harold Innis.[2] Underhill explained the circumstances of his remarks and promised that he would refrain from controversy in the future. At that time, the Board was of a mind to be satisfied with this resolution and allowed the issue to quietly drop. However, one year later Frank Underhill stepped into it again. At the Couchiching Conference of August 23, 1940, during the desperate early losses of WW II, Underhill suggested that the United States would become the defender of Canada while Britain's role would shrink.[3] The Toronto *Telegram* printed a sensationalized account of Underhill's comments which reported that Underhill had suggested that Britain should be abandoned in the war. This report immediately created a political uproar. Calls for Underhill's resignation and even jailing followed. President Cody, finally tiring of Underhill's many controversies, began to take steps for his removal. The Board delayed its final decision. In the meantime, Cody called a meeting for January 7, 1941 to hear representations of senior university personnel. At this meeting, along with his colleagues, Harold Innis defended Underhill's place in the university. Based on his previous support of Underhill in 1939, that is not surprising. However, what is surprising is the depth of passion that Innis mustered for Underhill's defense and the fact that Innis made it clear that his resignation on this issue was available. Based on this reaction, the controversy had evidently touched on some core values which Innis held sacrosanct. His public statement to Cody is so nakedly personal and provides such insight into his disposition, values, and character, that I will quote it at length.

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[1] Masters, *Henry John Cody*, 254, 256.

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[2] Masters, *Henry John Cody*, 256.

[3] Masters, *Henry John Cody*, 257-264.

> I imagine that I have crossed swords with greater violence with Professor Underhill on the platform and in print than any one else here or perhaps anywhere else. On the other hand as a returned man I should probably tip the scales in the other direction. It is possibly necessary to remember that any returned man who has faced continual dangers of modern warfare has a point of view fundamentally different from anyone who has not. Again and again have we told each other or repeated to ourselves, nothing can hurt us after this. The psychic perils of civilization mean nothing to us. Courage in the face of criticism of friend or foe means nothing to anyone requiring the courage to face imminent physical danger and death. All of you will have seen evidences of this fearlessness on the part of men who have seen active service and my own feeling is that it arises from that fact. If my resignation would save the President's position, the unity of the University, and Professor Underhill I would give it gladly. You may say that would take courage — I assure you it is nothing compared to the courage necessary to save a man's life under fire. The Board of Governors or the legislature cannot really hurt those of us who have seen modern warfare. If a man's academic life is endangered because of reckless fearlessness resulting from participation in war I should be glad to risk losing my own academic position to save him. So much for the frustration born of war.
>
> If the proposals regarding Professor Underhill are carried out, our task is hopeless and whether we like it or not we encourage the growth of beliefs in class struggle and foster the movements which we believe democratic civilization are at present threatened. I venture to think that the issue with which we are concerned is of far reaching vital importance — larger than any one of us, larger than this institution — a part of liberal democratic civilization itself. I am profoundly convinced that once the Board of Governors understands this, the immediate issue becomes of paltry importance. Can the University make a contribution to this war by dismissing a veteran of the last?[4]

Evidently, Harold Innis's war was not over. Although he had demobilized over twenty years earlier, he was prepared to stand in solidarity, in the trenches once again, for a fellow "returned man." He would return to that trench for the principle of defending "liberal democratic civilization." The transactions between Underhill and Innis are testimonies to personal character and to the political controversies of the times. Even in his defense of Underhill, Innis took pointed exception to Underhill's "beliefs in class struggle." Innis was not defending Underhill's beliefs, he was defending Underhill's place and rights as a scholar. Ultimately Innis was defending the freedom of the university. If Underhill could be silenced, all scholars were at risk. In his defense of Underhill, Innis made it clear that when it came to his own highest principles no sacrifice was unthinkable. Innis would abandon friends and allies like Cody and stand beside opponents like Underhill if that meant upholding his highest values. By his own words, Innis would sacrifice his career before compromising his defense of "liberal democratic civilization," and if this is true, it would appear that he learned this courage from the war.

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[4] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /005 (18) Correspondence from Innis to President Cody. Statement typed for the President's Personal Use. n.d. [Jan. 7, 1941].

The Underhill issue was not resolved at this meeting but was taken out of the university's hands. The controversy had attracted international attention due to Underhill's pronounced American sympathies. The Canadian government let it be known to the Ontario government, who passed the word along to the Board of Governors at Toronto, that Underhill's dismissal would be most unhelpful to crucial relations with the Americans, who had yet to commit to the war.[5] In later years, Frank Underhill, still pro-American, dropped his radical rhetoric and became a stalwart of the federal Liberal party.[6]

The Underhill controversy marks a sea change after which Innis begins to pay increasing attention to the 'political' aspects of political economy. The controversy demonstrated how close to the skin were Innis's liberal and democratic values and clearly demonstrated how wartime politics threatened those values. He recognized that liberal democracy was threatened when the state adopted a wartime footing. Innis was so alarmed by the endless march of warfare through his times that reflexively he began to politic through his speeches, in his writings, and by his association. It appears that WW II aggravated deep stresses in Innis's psyche. In the middle of the war, he wrote to President Cody stating "Here it may be said that I am still a psychological and a physical casualty of the last war."[7] Elsewhere he had occasion to state, "It has not been long since most of us have been awakened by nightmares of intense shellfire."[8] In 1943, he wrote to his colleague, A. H. Cole, that "after eight months of mud and lice and rats of France ... I have without a doubt developed an abnormal slant."[9] His personal friend George Ferguson who was also a "returned man" was left with the impression that Innis regarded war as "the ultimate obscenity."

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[5] Donald Creighton, "The Ogdensburg Agreement and F. H. Und[illegible]hill," *The Passionate Observer: Selected Writings* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 134-139.

[6] Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 195-200.

> He talked to me in those last months for the first time in his life about the war... All he could say about it was the horror of the performance. It was not that he himself had been wounded, that wasn't it. It was the more he thought about the thing, the more he thought of young men being destroyed, who might have been so valuably useful. And he would speak with real bitterness... bitterness I've never seen in another man about the stupidity of the whole performance which he had embarked on himself! Everybody did in those days! ... but by God he had come to some pretty violent conclusions about it...about the idea of war.[10]

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[7] Watson, "Marginal Man," 153.

[8] As cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 144.

[9] UTA Innis Papers B72-0025 /011 (01) Letter from Innis to Arthur H. Cole, Aug. 8, 1943.

[10] As cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 145.

It is important to bear in mind that for all his adult life, with perhaps the exception of the 1920's, Innis was a member of a civilization which was either at war, or was openly preparing for war. War was the problem of his times. Innis was spurred to investigate past civilizations to determine why his own times and civilization seemed so warlike. What seems to be, after staples, an explosion of diverse interests in politics, communications, empire and culture became a systematic strategy to diagnose the illness of his own civilization. W. T. Easterbrook, who was a close associate, once asked Innis why he had moved into Classical history. In reply, Innis spoke of "the pressing problems of survival of western civilization."[11] He was looking for "concepts which relate to the present" and trying to find an explanation for the fury of his times. As J. B. Brebner recalled, "it is apparent the War of 1939 shook him into a profound and almost entirely new phase."[12] In his concern to understand the problems of his times, Innis was spurred to undertake a wide ranging inquiry into the nature of civilization. Innis cast his net wide as he exchanged his abstract study past economies for a new focus on the contemporary problems of political economy. From 1940 to 1946 Innis published articles on a wide range of topics which included histories of publishing, post war rehabilitation, politics and the state, the price system and liquidity, capacity in transportation, the tariff, Russia, and, as well, the university, and the economics of culture. This transitional period between staples and communications was very creative in the scope of its exploration. After 1946 Innis would be publishing, almost exclusively, in a new research programme he called "communications." So, by the record of publication, the period bracketed by *The Cod Fisheries* in 1940 and "Minerva's Owl" in 1947 stands as the period in which Innis makes his creative leap.

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[11] UTA Easterbrook Papers B79-0039 /014 Lecture MSS, double-spaced typescript, no pagination. Entry of Nov. 18, 1952.

[12] J. B. Brebner, "Harold Adams Innis as Historian." *The Canadian Historical Association Report of the Annual Meeting held at London, June 4-6, 1953 with Historical Papers.* G.F.G. Stanley, L. Lamontagne, & P. G. Cornell eds., 21.

Political Economy in the Modern State (1946) encompasses the highlights of Innis's thinking in this transitional period. Some of Innis's most sophisticated statements on economic phenomena are found in this collection, as well as Innis's first forays into culture. In the preface for this volume, Innis begins an overture of soon to be familiar notes. He relates that as readers turn their minds to the tasks of peace, they should be aware of difficulties in the use of the "the mechanical word."[13] He recounts Plato's warning, from *Phaedrus,* on the effects of writing, "this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in learner's souls ... you give your disciples not truth but the semblance of truth."[14] According to Innis, the problem of his times was that the communications systems of the printing press and the radio had increased the difficulties of thought by creating violent swings of public opinion. Innis was attempting to recognize the cultural blindspots in his research. "The first essential task is to see and break through the chains of modern civilization which have been created by modern science." Innis considered "other cultures as mirrors in which we may see our own culture."[15] Innis was inviting readers to step out of the paradigm of their own culture by recognizing the problem of bias. Innis claimed that advances in mechanized communication had brought on war, and hot rhetoric, and exacerbated linguistic division. Innis suggested that it was his professional duty to "attack any concept which threatens to become a monopoly."[16] To sum up his own political position, Innis presented a quote by Goldwin Smith.

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[13] Harold A. Innis, "Preface," *Political Economy in the Modern State* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1946), vii. Hereafter *Political Economy*.

[14] Innis, "Preface," *Political Economy*, vii.

[15] Innis, "Industrialism and Cultural Values," *The Bias of Communication*, 132.

[16] Innis, "Preface," *Political Economy*, xvii.

Goldwin Smith was a British born Canadian, who had advanced annexation of Canada to United States in the 1890's, a belief repugnant to Innis. However, Innis agreed with Smith's sentiment on the nature of liberalism as a political philosophy and approvingly quoted it as representing his own thoughts on the matter.

> The opinions of the present writer are those of a Liberal of the old school as yet unconverted to State Socialism, who looks for further improvement not to an increase of the authority of government, but to the same agencies, moral, intellectual, and economical, which have brought us this far, and one of which, science, is now operating with immensely increased power. A writer of this school can have no panacea, or nostrum to offer; and when a panacea or nostrum is offered, he will necessarily be found on the critical side. He will look for improvement, not for regeneration; expect improvement still to be, as it has been, gradual; and hope much from steady, calm, and harmonious effort, little from violence or revolution. In his estimation the clearest gain reaped by the world from all the struggles through which it has been going, admidst much that is equivocal or still on trial, will be the liberty of opinion.[17]

As the preface to *Political Economy* alluded, Innis's inquiry into the nature of civilization had focused on four general topic areas: economic theory, politics and governance, research and the university, and publishing history. We can audit Innis's selection of problems in economic theory. Innis investigated the idea that institutional economic structures, such as feudalism, mercantilism, and capitalism, were developed in tandem with changing technology.[18] Innis explained that the international market's demand for the cash flexibility of gold bullion had changed the currency trading systems. This demand for liquidity prompted "cyclonic" gold rushes on the frontier which compelled the expansion of empire.[19] Innis analyzed the administrative peculiarities of the east coast as the product of imperfect competition.[20] He held that government use of tariff instruments indicated direct relationships between income and transportation problems. He claimed the Canadian economy was inefficient because it faced chronic problems in its transportation system. Vessels which carried outbound staples invariably had difficulty in finding inbound cargo. Colonial and Canadian governments had been expanded in an effort to solve these and other transportation problems. By Canada's example, in a familiar refrain, Innis concluded that "economies of frontier countries are the storm centres to the modern international economy."[21]

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[17] Goldwin Smith, *Essays on Questions of the Day*, as cited by Innis, *Political Economy*, xvii.

[18] Innis, "Penetrative Powers of the Price System," *Political Economy*, 145-167.

[19] Innis, "Liquidity Preference as a Factor in Industrial Development," *Political Economy*, 199.

In the area of governance, *Political Economy* shows that Innis's concerns were political, institutional and involved the tenor of the wartime and postwar state. "Decentralization and Democracy" (1943) is a key paper in which the influence of WW II is pronounced, in all but name. Ostensibly, Innis set out to examine "changes in the types of power in the Atlantic basin." This paper is remarkable for its emphatic denunciation of a host of trends under the guise of economic history. By recapitulating the entire economic history of Canada from the very beginnings to his day, Innis created an opening from which he could inject his personal diagnosis into the political debate of the times. In the very last pages in a hitherto turgid account, Innis made a staccato series of claims. Provincialism grew with new industrialism. Trade had shifted to the United States. The political structure was being stressed. The senate was ineffectual. The courts were the product of patronage. The Supreme Court was rendered impotent by decisions of the British Privy Council. Politics was corrupt with patronage. MPs were weak.

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[20] Innis, "Imperfect Regional Competition and Political Institutions on the North Atlantic Seaboard," *Political Economy*, 229-236.

[21] Innis, "The Political Implications of Unused Capacity," *Political Economy*, 228.

The cabinet was dictatorial. Newspaper influence on politics was declining while political use of radio was increasing. The civil service was untrammeled. The opposition was weak and provinces, themselves, opted for that role. The rise of new parties demonstrated the fragmentation of Canada into regional interests. Ideological politicking meant neglecting the practical problems of government. The political structure was obsolete. Atlantic power was passing from Britain to the United States. Innis pointedly expressed the hope that political scientists should escape the "hocus pocus of economists."[22] Innis insisted that there were no quick solutions to be had by tinkering with the economy. In fact, the best contribution to economic development could be made "by suggesting modifications to political machinery." "Decentralization and Democracy" is among the first presentations of a blatantly polemical tone which would emerge in the last third of Innis's career.

Innis saw that WW II was accelerating Canada's fall into the American orbit and he saw that the needs of total war had a totalitarian influence on the direction of the Canadian state. His fears would not be abated with the war's end when he saw Canada fall a satellite to American fortune while the United States engaged the Soviet Union in a dangerous foreign policy of confrontation. Innis worried about "the problem of peace."[23] He decried the lack of good men in government. He decried the actions of the press in stirring up new hostilities. Innis wrote that the ignorance of Russian history must be addressed before the Soviets could be fruitfully engaged in a realpolitik.[24] In a fascinating departure from orthodoxy, Innis suggested that although the Soviet Union was a state considered on the ideological "left," it was actually, by its military organization, "a powerful centralized force which was essentially [on the] right."[25] Innis said that this mistaken conception had led to confusion in the new world order. He believed that as Russia was heir to Greek Byzantium, and as the West was heir to Latin Rome, deep traditions separated those cultures, creating opportunities for misunderstanding. Innis believed that it was incumbent on universities "to attack the problem of misunderstanding."[26]

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[22] Innis, "Decentralization and Democracy," *Essays*, 371.

[23] Innis, "The Problems of Rehabilitation," *Political Economy*, 57.

[24] Innis, "Reflections on Russia," *Political Economy*, 257.

Political Economy in the Modern State also framed a concern with the institution of the university and the limitations of the social sciences. In an essay of the same name, Innis referred to the "tyranny of opinion" which had invaded the universities at the same time as the social sciences were warped into a political tool for the benefit of bureaucracy. With the onrush of technology, the creation of healthy limits to power had become increasingly difficult. Power had followed empires, the church, politics and science. Innis thought that the duty of the social sciences and the university was to play a stabilizing role in civilization. Instead, the university concentrated its "attention on public opinion as the source of power." With a bitter taste in his mouth, Innis wrote, "The descent of the university into the market place reflects the lie in the soul of modern society."[27] In one convocation address Innis called for the protection of the university as "she is besieged on all hands by villains."[28] Innis felt that the university was no longer a universal institution as it had been in the Middle Ages. The university had been injured by those who had forgotten that its existence "depended on the search for truth and not truth."[29] In the search for truth Innis found virtue in the middle way of thoughtful balance. Innis believed that the university needed to be protected from political interference because academe occupied an important role in the rehabilitation of civilization. He suggested that the mass media had created violent swings in public opinion which subsequently created strains in the university and in the social sciences. "Universities are menaced by specialization and the belief on the part of the specialist that no other interest than their own is important."[30] Innis spoke of the limitations of intellectual inquiry, in the language that he had previously used in the hot political debates of the thirties.

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[25] Innis had a tendency to associate force and the military with the attributes of the "right," and intellectualism with the attributes of the "left," irrespective of the political system in which those tendencies were found. His ideal was the balance of force and the intellect as symbolized by the Greek goddess, Athena who was the goddess of wisdom and war and who was known in Latin as Minerva.

[26] Innis, "Reflections on Russia," *Political Economy*, 270.

[27] Innis, "The University in Crises," *Political Economy*, 76.

[28] Innis, "A Plea for the University Tradition," *Political Economy*, 65.

> We must beware of those who have found the truth. The excesses of individualism rather than the integration of personality have characterized the schizophrenia of Western Civilization. It is the essence of the philosophy of the social sciences that concern should be given primarily to their limitations. "Above all—no zeal."

Innis believed that the integrity of political economy as a whole had been shattered. As the price system had developed into cash liquidity this created an opportunity for a mathematical style of economics. Mathematical economics had evolved into specialized lines of inquiry which apparently surrendered the attempt at understanding the larger picture in favour of describing small details. Innis indicated that cultural growth was the mark of health in the modern state. However, Canada had exceptional problems against the pull of the North Atlantic triangle. "In a sense Canada becomes a headless nation with her brains scattered over other countries."[31] Innis noted that the study of civilization was a characteristic of his own civilization. He suggested that social scientists should be mindful of understanding their own place in the process of cultural growth. He implied that social scientists should understand their limitations in order to work within fruitful boundaries.

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[29] Innis, "A Plea for the University Tradition," *Political Economy*, 65.
[30] Innis, "Preface," *Political Economy*, viii.
[31] Innis, "Preface," *Political Economy*, xi.

Finally *Political Economy in the Modern State* reported on the economic history of publishing. To follow the thread which becomes the strand of communications, "The Newspaper in Economic Development"(1942) stands as a critical work because it marks Innis's first foray into the economics of publishing. This investigation of the press reflected the concerns of an economist. It described the evolution of the modern newspaper by itemizing innovations in printing technology, the institutionalization of advertising, and the application of growing economies of scale. Innis explored the development of political power as it became centred in American newspapers. He noted how newspapers kept the political pot boiling so they could exploit the sensational and thereby sell more papers. He commented on the powerful influence of newspaper proprietors in setting the American national agenda. He found that while newspapers promoted literacy in the lower classes, because of their commercial concerns newspapers were generally a conservative force. Innis was skeptical of the newspaper's self-image as a bulwark of democracy, commenting that "freedom of the press has made freedom of speech impossible."[32] He also believed that newspapers used the issue of press freedom "as a support to their monopoly position."[33] Innis was exploring the wider transforming capabilities of mass media. He thought that the newspaper had accelerated the "development of speed in communication and transportation" in modern civilization.[34] Innis also speculated that "the depression may be in part the result of changes introduced by radio."[35] In a curious development, Innis began to investigate the relationship between the sense of time and the use of technology.

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[32] Innis, "The Newspaper in Economic Development," *Political Economy*, 2.
[33] Innis, "The Newspaper in Economic Development," *Political Economy*, 17.

> Finally this paper is designed to emphasize the importance of a change in the concept of time, and to argue that it can not be argued as a straight line but as a series of curves depending in part on technological advances ... The concepts of time and space must be made relative and elastic and the attention given by the social scientists to the problems of space should be paralleled by attention to the problems of time.

Innis's research into the pulp and paper economy had led him to the newspaper. It appears that Innis began, but did not publish, his research. He discovered that the market for Canadian pulp and paper had an unusual dimension. Cheap paper made from wood pulp was the foundation of the modern American big city newspaper. The market demand for newsprint was dependent on two factors. The first was the ability to stir up an excited newspaper-buying public. The second was the ability of a newspaper to sell advertising. Unlike markets for staple goods, which dealt in concrete objects like fish and furs, the markets which drew on paper dealt in the intangibles of information, culture, and persuasion. The paper itself was not remanufactured into a good, it was remanufactured to carry another good — the news of the day. News was an abstract commodity tied to culture, reflecting its values. As well as being the primary market for pulp and paper, the newspaper was also the staple in the distribution system of modern culture. In studying the newspaper as a market for wood pulp, Harold Innis had brushed up against the economy of ideas.

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[34] Innis, "The Newspaper in Economic Development," *Political Economy*, 32.
[35] Innis, "The Newspaper in Economic Development," *Political Economy*, 34.

One of the last inclusions in *Political Economy* was a meditation on the goals and limits of Innis's research programme. This paper demonstrates how his various themes were interwoven and inextricable. Written in 1946, "On the Economic Significance of Cultural Factors," was remarkable for its playfulness, its philosophical depth, and its signal that Innis had reached the limits of his tools.

> We need a sociology or a philosophy of the social sciences and particularly economics, an economic history of knowledge, an economic history of economic history.[36]

Innis was querying the limitations of the social sciences and he reflexively turned those tools back on themselves. He offers a pivotal statement which reveals the bridge in his research programme. "Geography has been effective in determining the grooves of economic life through its effects on transportation and communication."[37] Industrial papermaking, the modern newspaper and the telegraph, by carrying the commodities of news and advertising, had acted together "to create efficient channels for the spread of information." Business and technical institutions provided the landscape of communications. But, by the nineteenth century, the newspaper became such a powerful tool that it had "rendered obsolete the machinery for maintaining peace."[38] Innis framed the quandary of modern times as a quest to "find a solution to the eternal problem of freedom and power." He suggested that the emergence of psychology as a discipline was, in itself, a symptom of the modern outbreak of irrationality. For Innis, economic history was "a search for patterns" which insisted "that tools must be used, and not described." [39] Economic history was an important tool to offset the present-mindedness of the times and economic history had a duty to build up spiritual, intellectual and material capital. While a delightful rhetorical performance, this paper signals a philosophical examination of the assumptions and weaknesses of knowledge. As Innis was beginning to understand the bias of his times he had to contend with the philosophical problem of epistemology, or in F. R. Scott's words, the "knowledge of how to use knowledge."

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[36] Innis, "On the Economic Significance of Cultural Factors," *Political Economy*, 83.

[37] Innis, "On the Economic Significance of Cultural Factors," *Political Economy*, 88.

In the tensions of the post war period, Harold Innis began to sound very shrill.

> Modern civilization, characterized by an enormous increase in the output of mechanized knowledge with the newspaper, the book, the radio and the cinema, has produced a state of numbness, pleasure, and self complacency perhaps only equaled by laughing gas. In the words of Oscar Wilde, we have sold our birthright for a mess of facts. The demands of the machine are insatiable. The danger of shaking men out of the soporific results of mechanized knowledge is similar to that of attempting to arouse a drunken man or one who has taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. The necessary violent measures will be disliked. We have had university professors threatened with the loss of

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[38] Innis, "On the Economic Significance of Cultural Factors," *Political Economy*, 95, 96.

[39] Innis, "On the Economic Significance of Cultural Factors," *Political Economy*, 100, 101.

> their positions for less than this. But I have little hope of making any impression with what I have to say.[40]

"The Church in Canada" (1947), from which the above is taken, is the text of an address given to an assembly of the United Church. The bitter tone of this address is shocking and seems quite out of public character. There rests a clue for the intensity of this speech, in the nature of a question that Innis puts to the church: "Does it appreciate the significance of the interest of the totalitarian state in science and its abhorrence of philosophy?" Innis feared the totalitarian state and its militaristic concern with projecting power over space. He saw that philosophy and religion offered ways of thinking which were concerned with the meaning of time. Science meant power but philosophy meant questioning the underpinnings of power. Innis suggested there was a direct relationship between totalitarianism and "mechanized knowledge." The total state was a creature of the machine process, fed by warfare. Innis left the innuendo hanging that Canada was embracing totalitarianism.

By 1947, Canada was well embroiled in the Cold War. Igor Gouzenko's revelations of Soviet espionage in Canada helped trigger hostilities, and the initial Canadian response was a fully sympathetic and uncritical reflection of American policy. The wartime state had not yet demobilized when it began to reach again for more resources. Innis regarded Canada's best interests as separate from those of the American empire. He had been invited to the

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[40] Innis, "The Church in Canada," *Essays*, 383, 389.

Soviet Union in August 1945 as a part of an international contingent to mark the 220th anniversary of the Academy of Sciences. This journey affected him deeply. He had little sympathy for communism. He considered it ironic that role of communism was to act as an ordering philosophy to deliver a technically backward people to the discipline of the industrial machine process.[41] In the greater picture he felt that "Communism [was] a device for saving capitalism as reformation saved church."[42] On the other hand, Innis was sympathetic to the Russian people and their history, and he was both touched and distressed by the magnitude of the wartime devastation. "I think I learned a little about the necessity of being tolerant and to be a little humiliated that I knew almost nothing about the situation."[43] He thought that the Americans were ill suited by their beliefs and lack of experience to dominate the new postwar order and he regarded American bellicosity towards the Soviets as indicative of this failing. To address this problem in part, he joined the Committee to Frame a World Constitution.

The Committee to Frame a World Constitution was very much a creature of the University of Chicago. The Committee was led by Chicago's ambitious President, Robert M. Hutchings, and by G. Antonio Borgese, a professor of Italian who had fled Fascist Italy to America because he had been endangered by his passionate social democratic views. The Committee had eleven members and over half held senior positions at Chicago in a variety of disciplines. The Committee proposed a constitution for a world federalist government which was democratic, economically pluralist, founded on the rule of law, and based on human rights. It was generally an open, liberal concept—with a social floor—and as might be expected from its membership, the document reflected American constitutional values. The Committee fleshed out their concept of a World Government as "a proposal to history." This work was motivated by the fear of an atomic "conflagration" between Russia and America "out of which would emerge ... not one Rome but two Carthages."[44] Innis's participation in this Committee was low key.[45] He had joined as a replacement member and had not been present for original discussions. However, he placed his signature with others of the Committee when the *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution* was published in 1948. The Committee did not survive the politics of the phenomenon it was trying to remedy. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 ostensibly closed the American chapter on the World Government movement. By 1951, McCarthyism had chased Borgese back to Italy where he died shortly after his return. Other proponents of World Government would attract sustained hostility.[46] In the United States, the discipline of the Cold War had acted to constrain even high-minded and academic alternatives to global power politics.

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[41] Harold A. Innis, *The Idea File of Harold Adams Innis*, intro. & ed. by William Christian. (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1980), page 123, number 6. Hereafter *Idea File*.

[42] Innis, *Idea File*, page 127, number 349.

[43] UTA Innis Papers B72-0025 /011 (01) Letter from Innis to Anne Bezanson, Aug. 31, 1945.

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[44] *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948), vii. Rexford G. Tugwell was a member and wrote that the Committee was created in reaction to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. See Rexford G. Tugwell, *A Chronicle of Jeopardy 1945-55* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 64. Tugwell spoke of the Committee's motivation. "I persisted, along with a few others, for the sheer need of doing something, however remote the chance that it might be useful in the deepening crises."

[45] Mortimer J. Adler, *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977), 225. Adler, who was a founding Committee member, does not mention Innis in his enumeration of the Committee. As well, there is no record of any background paper prepared by Innis in the lengthy "Index of Committee Documents" in *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution*, 69-81.

Innis was prepared to publicly associate himself with this statement of principles since they served his interests. A federal world government would act as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. More importantly, to Innis's immediate and local concerns as a Canadian, a world government would act to limit the imperial power of the United States.

In 1948, Innis published, "Great Britain, The United States and Canada" which was an examination of the power relations between the English-speaking countries of the Atlantic Ocean. This paper is an apprehensive contemplation on the postwar dominance of the United States. Innis examined the role that Canada was assigned in the new world order. He drew attention to the fact that Canada had been built on an east-west system and had been linked to Britain and Europe. With the resources boom, the Precambrian Shield, which had previously been the barricade to east-west travel, was transformed into a storehouse of important industrial raw materials. These staples were now drawn to the United States causing "disturbances" in the Canadian constitutional structure.[47] Just as the staple trade had organized Canada in terms of metropolitan Europe, it was now organizing Canada in terms of metropolitan United States. The integrity of

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[46] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 224-225.
[47] Innis, "Great Britain, the United States and Canada," *Essays*, 396.

Canada, developed on an east-west basis, was fracturing into regional interests. The influence of the American market created regional friction and a "vast realignment of the Canadian system."[48] He acerbically observed that American branch plants promoted Canadian nationalism as being advantageous to their own situation. Canadians were embracing an imperialism which insisted that it was not imperialistic. In a savage play on the title of *Colony to Nation* (1946), written by fellow historian Arthur Lower, Harold Innis wrote, "Canada moved from colony to nation to colony."

Along with this bitter play on words, Innis indicated the relationship of communications media to political power. He explained the rise of Alberta premier William Aberhart as due to the power of radio. When he charged that dull government commissions were an attempt to use boredom as a weapon to turn away the attention of a press addicted to the sensational, one presumes he knew of what he spoke from personal experience as a commissioner. Innis noticed that there was a bias in the media toward to the sensational. "A commercial society in a newspaper civilization is profoundly influenced by the type of news which makes for wider circulation of newspapers."[49] Innis equated advertising with propaganda and stated that the Americans were the best propagandists because they were the best advertisers.[50]

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[48] Innis, "Great Britain, the United States and Canada," *Essays*, 404, 405.

[49] Innis, "Great Britain, the United States and Canada," *Essays*, 407.

[50] Innis, "Great Britain, the United States and Canada," *Essays*, 411.

It is useful to highlight a key idea which is common to Innis's early and later work. Part of the link between the staples and the communications ideas can be found in the emphasis Innis placed on the principle that technology organizes human behaviour. From his studies at the University of Chicago, Innis had been cued to recognize the social effects of technology, including communications technology. As early as 1924, while passing through Saskatchewan, Innis, in his inimitable style, noted the influence of communications technology in that province.

> Automobile—garages—telephone and organizing of back districts—i.e. organization of wheat pool. Coming of radio and possible effects.[51]

Innis saw that the telephone had made the organization of the wheat pool possible by providing hinterland wheat farmers with an effective instrument to communicate their economic interests. Remarkably, radio had yet to be established in Saskatchewan and Innis was already speculating as to its "possible effects." Innis had learned to see social consequences which were tied to emerging technologies. He carried this principle all through his work in staples and into his studies of communications.

Harold Innis's great intellectual leap was the result of leaping sideways. After he had exhausted examining the technology of primary resources, he applied his methodology to another kind of technology. He brought his analysis of the social influence of technology and applied it to the technology of communications. Innis' systematic examination of communications media, beginning with the newspaper, led him to conclude that the technology of communications was the elite technology of any given culture. The treasures of a culture's knowledge were bound in that culture's dominant medium. When Innis recognized that papyrus, like the birch canoe, only favoured certain kinds of traffic, he was applying his array of analytical biases onto a new topic, the economy of knowledge.

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[51] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /006 (03) Field Notes, Mackenzie River Trip, 1924. Typescript, 22 pp. Entry of May 24, 1924, Gogama, Saskatchewan, 3.

In 1948 Innis was invited to deliver the Beit Lectures at Oxford. These lectures were later published as *Empire and Communications* (1950) and formed Innis's first collection of communications works. In the Introduction he commented that the modern concern with the study of civilizations indicates "an intense interest in the possible future of our own civilization."[52] Innis articulated the difficulties and the intentions involved in this programme of research. He confessed that as an economist his conceptual tools were limited by his bias and he cautioned that readers should be alert to bias. Innis explicitly tied his research in communications to his concern for the survival of civilization. "Civilizations can survive only through a concern with their limitations, and in turn through a concern with the limitations of their institutions, including empires."[53] Innis explained his interest in communications. "It has seemed to me that the subject of communications offers possibilities in that it occupies a crucial position in the organization of government and in turn of Empires and Western civilization." However, Innis confessed another "bias," which led him to give "particular attention" to communications. In his studies of economic history, Innis was influenced by a "phenomenon strikingly evident in Canada." Innis recognized that "North America is deeply penetrated by three vast inlets from the Atlantic — the Mississippi, the St. Lawrence, and Hudson Bay." These communications avenues influenced the economic development of North America. Innis reprised the dynamics of his stapes thesis. In Canada, staple production was a powerful influence on economic, political and social structures.

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[52] Harold A. Innis. "Introduction," *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 3.

[53] Innis, "Introduction," *Empire and Communications*, 4, 5.

> Each staple in turn left its stamp, and the shift to new staples invariably produced periods of crises in which adjustments to the old structure were painfully made and a new pattern created in relation to the new staple.[54]

Innis alluded that, in his work on staples, he had done little "to indicate clearly the effects of the pulp and paper industry." This industry was difficult to study, first because it was newly developed, and second because "analyzing the demand for the finished market" was a complex problem. The demand market for pulp and paper had unusual dimensions. The supply of cheap newsprint had sensationalized public opinion and Innis claimed that "the changing character of the British Empire during the present century has been in part a result of the pulp and paper industry and its influence on public opinion." Innis proposed that empires could be examined in a case study approach to find the general significance of communication systems. He suggested that the difficulty for one civilization to understand another civilization is not only due to the obvious culture differences but due to the differences between respective media systems as well. As Innis had once used staples as a marker and index of empire, he was attempting a similar strategy with media "by using the concept of empire as an indication of the efficiency of communication."[55] From this introduction, we can see that Innis had carried forward the conceptual tools and biases which he had honed in the study of economic history, and he applied his methods to the history of imperial communication systems. From river systems, to wood pulp, to empire, — communications was at the heart of human activity.

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[54] Innis, "Introduction," *Empire and Communications*, 5, 6.

[55] Innis, "Introduction," *Empire and Communications*, 9.

Innis argued that civilizations were limited, or biased, by their primary medium of communication. Cultures which used heavy and enduring media such as stone or fired clay, tended to emphasize the dimension of time and their institutions were hierarchical and decentralized. Lighter, more fragile media, such as papyrus or paper, tended to emphasize space and promoted centralized, less hierarchical governments, usually concerned with extensive trade or administrative networks.[56] Heavy media demonstrated a preoccupation with time, usually religious in orientation, while light media showed an interest in dominating space, as in empire. Innis examined how the medium, which was the vehicle of communication, impinged on the content or message of communication. He tested Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman civilizations for their specific dominant medium and explained how each respective medium reflected the cultural project of that civilization.

Innis made the observation that the material base of a medium of communication, such as the newspaper compared to the radio, had a direct influence on the content of that communication. The capacity of the carrier structured the content of the message. This is the same kind of argument that Innis had applied to the fur trade, in which the limitations of the canoe defined the kind of good it could carry. Innis found that the cycles within the political economy of media exhibited similar behaviors to the cycles found in the political economy of staples. However, unlike staples, which were tangible primary resources, the content of media was intangible. Innis had followed his conceptual tools to their limits and he realized that fundamentally, "Economics [was] based on communication.[57]

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[56] Innis, "Introduction," *Empire and Communications*, 7.

One year prior to the Beit Lectures, Harold Innis delivered his Presidential Address to the Royal Society of Canada. "Minerva's Owl" stands as Innis's definitive programmatic statement on communications. Therein Innis stated the thesis that "western civilization has been profoundly influenced by communications and that marked changes in communications have important implications."[58] Innis thought that historical periods could be established by referring to the dominant medium of the period. Changes in the dominant medium signaled a change in periods.

> In each period I have attempted to trace the implications of the media of communication for the character of knowledge and to suggest that a monopoly or oligopoly of knowledge is built up to the point that equilibrium is disturbed.

Monopolies of knowledge are based on specialized media controlled by elites. With technological advances, "inventions in communication compel realignments in the monopoly or the oligopoly of knowledge." Innis identified Western monasticism as one example of this process. Monasteries, which derived power by their monopoly control over manuscript books, were overthrown by the machined pages of the printing press. Innis emphasized that characteristics of specific media have specific historical influences. The spread of culture was linked to the ease and cheapness of its media. "The spread of paper from China hastened the growth of commerce in Italy and Northern Europe,"[59] and further "the cable [telegraph] compelled contraction of language and facilitated a rapid widening between the English and American languages."[60]

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[57] Innis, *Idea File*, page 200, number 22.

[58] Innis, "Minerva's Owl," *The Bias of Communication*, 3, 4.

[59] Innis, "Minerva's Owl," *The Bias of Communication*, 20.

[60] Innis, "Minerva's Owl," *The Bias of Communication*, 28.

The most provocative idea that Innis explores in this essay is the nature of social change. He postulates that new communications technologies do not create incremental changes, but rather entire changes of kind which shake civilizations to their roots.

> The effect of the discovery of printing was evident in the savage religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Application of power to communication industries hastened the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism, revolution, and new outbreaks of savagery in the twentieth century.[61]

Changing the dominant means of communication created cultural and psychological change. "Mechanized communication divided reason from emotion and emphasized the latter." He found that the methods which he used to explain change in the staple trade had application to communications technologies. "I have attempted to show that sudden extensions of communication are reflected in cultural disturbances." We have encountered these storms previously as "cyclonics."

Harold Innis did not create an integrated theory of communications, but time after time he applied media analysis to arrive at a historical understanding of a period. His analysis of media led him to see that each form of media technology carried an inherent bias. Each bias was crystallized into a monopoly of knowledge, and monopolies reigned until they were overthrown by new technologies of communication which then carried the focal point of the next monopoly. It may be fair to characterize this explanation of change in civilizations as a dialectical progression of media.

This is the importance of Minerva's owl. By using Minerva's owl as a metaphor, Innis was signaling that he was returning to Hegel to pick up a dialectical understanding of the process of history which predated that of Karl Marx. Throughout his career as an economist, Innis had been forced to consider and wrestle with the ideas of Karl Marx. The weight of Marx's economic thought demanded analysis, criticism and reply. I suggest that Innis meant to take Marx on by going back to Marx's own roots in the writings of Georg Friederich Hegel. Hegel had revived the Greek conception of the dialectic which was an idea of two oppositional forces in contention. Hegel believed that historic change occurred in series of steps by "a spirit at war with itself." Hegel was an Idealist and he saw spirit acting in history ever striving to reach higher goals. With the successful realization of each goal, brand new goals were set and with their fulfillment former goals were "negated" and set aside. Spirit ascended through history by the ratcheting of the dialectic. Marx appropriated Hegel's idea of a dialectic acting through history but he stripped away its spiritual animation. Marx did not live in a world in which spirit guided history. He lived in a world in which material reality was what really mattered, and his concern was that there was a real imbalance in the distribution of material wealth. For Marx, the dialectic which ratcheted history forward was the polarity of the class struggle. As an economic historian, Marx determined that elite classes bred their own opposition in the underclass and it was this struggle between dominating and oppositional classes which created the tension which drove society forward. Marx saw this dynamic as a contest between opposing forces of "thesis" and "antithesis." This dialectic struggle would find resolution in some sort of a "synthesis" between the competitors. This synthesis would become the basis for the next thesis or dominant class and the process would repeat itself *ad infinitum* until the final epoch would be reached in which all contradictions would be somehow resolved. Marx believed that his methodology presented a scientific explanation of how history worked.

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[61] Innis, "Minerva's Owl," *The Bias of Communication*, 29, 30, 31.

Innis spent some effort working on Marx's grasp of history and he seemed to regard it as a bit of a challenge.

> Much of this will smack of Marxian interpretation but I have tried to use the Marxian interpretation to interpret Marx. There has been no systematic pushing of the Marxian conclusion to its ultimate limit, and in pushing it to its limit, showing its limitations.[62]

Innis believed that Marxist thinking emphasized technological influences[63] through its concern with ownership of the 'the means of production.' This is because the means of production were the tools which generated wealth. As Marx wrote:

> In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production, their manner of gaining a living, they change all their social relations. The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill a society with the industrial capitalist.[64]

For Marx, the ability to control wealth-producing technology defined the class structure. Marx thought that elite classes gained their power because they controlled the means of production and the means of production was technologically based. In his theory, Marx believed that changes in the ownership of the means of production would occur by violent revolution, when rising classes would compete for power with the dominant class. Innis pushed Marx's idea that control of technology defined social strata.[65] Innis appears to have reversed Marx suggesting that, rather than by class warfare, it was revolutions in technology which acted to displace power elites. Like Marx, Innis thought that monopoly control of the means of production was an index of power, but there was a caveat. For Innis, unlike Marx, all technology was not equal, and for Innis, central power was associated with those who specifically controlled the technology of communication. Controlling the technology of communication meant the ability to write the civilization's core programme. Ironically Innis's concept is better able to explain the conditions of revolution while that of Marx is better able to explain periods of stability. If Marx stood Hegel on his head, Innis stood Marx on his. "When Marx wrote you have nothing to lose but your chains in those words he forged new chains."[66]

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[62] Innis, "A Critical Review," *The Bias of Communication*, 190.

[63] Innis, *Idea File*, page 102, number 14.

[64] Marx and Engels, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, (New York: 1976), 166.

[65] Innis, *Idea File*, page 52, number 167.

Innis thought that the bias of modern times was driven by the newspaper and radio. He paraphrased Marx suggesting that the press was the opiate of the masses.[67] His concern was that "the Western community was atomized by the pulverizing effects of the application of the machine industry to communication."[68] Machine culture, through communications, had distorted the modern time sense to the extent that the historical sense of things was being drowned in the bias of a present-centred immediacy. The fabric of time was being sliced for the machinery of business.

> Industrialism implies technology and the cutting into precise fragments suited to the needs of the engineer and the accountant."[69]

Innis believed that modern civilization had become unbalanced by its emphasis on the control of space. Innis felt that modernity had lost a proper sense of time, its sense of participating in a historic process. Modernity had little sense of its own history as it was buffeted by rapid technical change. Innis felt that endemic instability had deadly consequences, including annihilation.

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[66] Innis, *Idea File*, page 43, number 126.

[67] Innis, *Idea File*, page 12, number 42, and page 27, number 12.

[68] Innis, "A Plea for Time," *The Bias of Communication*, 79.

[69] Innis, "Industrialism and Cultural Values," *The Bias of Communication*, 140.

> Stability which characterized certain periods in earlier civilizations is not the obvious objective of this civilization. Each civilization has its own methods of suicide.[70]

His grim vision was lost on his colleagues and peers. Through his work in staples economics, Innis had obtained the stature to be invited to prestigious audiences. However, he did not reprise his tried and true economic history, but presented his new material without being fully prepared. The Beit Lectures were not regarded a success as attendance obviously dwindled during the series. Arthur Lower recalled that "Minerva's Owl" was a flop.

> "Minerva's Owl" took flight into the gathering darkness and flew off into the woods, apparently, and disappeared. Well so did his audience! ... he killed every audience that way except, perhaps a few acolytes in the front row who were taking down the words of the priest.[71]

Even a kindred spirit in the study of civilization such as V. Gordon Childe found that, while Innis was ambitious in raising "the general question of the influence of other media ... by comparing civilizations," Innis's work was flawed in errors of detail which precluded "reliable results."[72] Colleagues were puzzled by the vast scope of his new work with private judgments that he was out of his league. Friends regretted an emerging somberness in his concerns. Innis had fallen out of synch and his work had fallen out of influence. However, a young Marshall McLuhan would be so galvanized by the depth of Harold Innis's research programme into the technologies of media, that he would adopt it for his own.[73]

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[70] Innis, "Industrialism and Cultural Values," *The Bias of Communication*, 141.

[71] As cited by Watson, "Marginal Man," 7.

[72] V. Gordon Childe, review of *Empire and Communications* by Harold A. Innis. In *Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science* 18 no. 1, (1951): 98-100.

Innis's concern with national problems in communications was so intense that he became a pamphleteer in order to publish "The Strategy of Culture: Footnote to the Massey Report."[74] Innis republished this article, along with several others, in a collection called *Changing Concepts of Time* (1952). These papers were an elaboration of his communications thesis as applied towards the "immediate problems" of Canada.[75] In his prefatory remarks Innis argued that the senses of space and time vary, relative to culture. These variations were the result of "technological changes in communications." Ironically, he believed that improved communications led to problems of misunderstanding. Since the nineteenth century, modernity had adopted a dismembered sense of time which could only focus on the present and was unable to take the long view. This present-mindedness was a "result, and a cause" of war. Power and force overtook intelligence and the pursuit of power promoted short term interests. He closed with an ironic remark which, through the torture of syntax, was designed to cover his motives as much as it was to reveal them. "But it will not do to join the great chorus of those who create a crisis by saying there is a crisis."

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[73] See George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald, eds., *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 1989), 112. The American historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. analyzed Marshall McLuhan's research programme in these terms. "Marx used to say changes in the modes of production determine the movement of history. What Marshall McLuhan in effect was saying was that changes in modes of communications determine the movement of history. The point he was making was revolutionary, he made it in a faddish way." While there was much of McLuhan that was entirely his own — this iteration of the process of history should be recognized as pure Innis.

[74] The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, otherwise known as the Massey Commission, had been struck by the Canadian government in 1949. Its task had been to examine the state of cultural life in Canada and it reported in 1951.

[75] Harold A. Innis, "Preface," *Changing Concepts of Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), v, vi.

Crisis or no, "The Strategy of Culture" was so powerful that it prompted Innis's old friend and naturalized American, John Bartlett Brebner to refer to it as that "final stark jeremiad for Canadian culture."[76] As Brebner noticed, in injured tones, this screed was intended "to make up for ... the timidity of the Massey Report."[77] This was Innis's last paper and he did not hold back. As was his wont, Innis began by sketching an historical account of North American publishing directed by technological and commercial advances. Industry and advertising combined to create commercialism which had "distorted" culture in the United States. The American government had learned the art of propaganda from business and marshaled it to powerful effect during WW II. Canada was being swamped with American media to such a degree that the very existence of the Canadian state was at stake. Innis welcomed the Canadian government's modest signal to intervene in radio, television, film, the universities and the arts as a strategy of culture to offset "American imperialism in all its attractive guises."[78]

> We are indeed fighting for our lives. The pernicious influence of American advertising reflected especially in the periodical press and the powerful persistent impact of commercialism have been evident in all the ramifications of Canadian life. The jackals of communication are constantly on the alert to destroy every last vestige of sentiment toward Great Britain holding it of no advantage if it threatens the omnipotence of American commercialism ... our status on the North American continent is on the verge of disappearing."[79]

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[76] J. B. Brebner, "Harold Adams Innis as Historian." *The Canadian Historical Association Report of the Annual Meeting held at London, June 4-6, 1953 with Historical Papers.* G.F.G. Stanley, L. Lamontagne, & P. G. Cornell eds., 14.

[77] Brebner, "Harold Adams Innis as Historian," 14.

[78] Harold A. Innis, "The Strategy of Culture: With Special Reference to Canadian Literature—A Footnote to the Massey Report," *Changing Concepts of Time*, 20.

[79] Innis, "The Strategy of Culture," *Changing Concepts of Time*, 19.

Harold Innis, more than anyone of his generation, had reviewed the power of imperial communication systems through space and time and he despaired for the fate of Canada. His fear of absorption into the new American empire had finally shaken him into an activist position, a posture which he had previously held unthinkable for an academic. Irene Biss Spry discerned that by publishing "The Strategy of Culture," Harold Innis was "coming out of the ivory tower."[80]

"The Strategy of Culture" is remarkable for its activism and it is a signal that Innis appears to have changed certain well defended principles of his thinking. The same Harold Innis who fought the League for Social Reconstruction with such zeal during the height of the Depression was now calling for wholesale state intervention to create an infrastructure designed to support Canadian culture. So what happened here? There appears to be a great contradiction in the character of the man who was formerly suspicious of state solutions to problems, to a man who was now promoting state solutions. Within his liberal, pluralist principles of citizenship, Innis was fundamentally opposed to monopolies of power as a first principle.[81] Without limits to freedom, there would be no balance of freedom, only monopolies of the marketplace or of the mind. Innis saw the United States as an embodiment of a new monopoly of knowledge which was relentlessly extinguishing things Canadian. When Innis called for the Canadian state to offer strategic competition to the American empire, he saw it as a lesser order of monopoly struggling with a higher order of monopoly. A conscious strategy to offset the American monopoly in communications would shelter

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[80] UTA Innis Papers. Audio tape not catalogued. Irene Biss Spry interview with Paul Kennedy. Tape 1.

[81] Innis, "Preface," *Political Economy*, xvii.

Canadian culture. In the manner that building the CPR held the West for Canada, state broadcasting would hold the airwaves for Canada. Innis saw that media technology projected sovereignty over space. In conjunction with the imminent possibility of atomic war between the USA and the USSR, Innis saw the fragility of Canadian survival as the paramount political issue of the postwar period and he adjusted his thinking to support this principle. Innis was not arguing the ideology of Canadian nationalism — he had difficulties with nationalism of any stripe — but rather he was arguing in favour of creating opportunities for Canadian diversity, not a tacit acquiescence to the monoculture of American empire.

This paper was his last fusillade, brief, glorious and fully engaged. Innis's health failed in 1951 and he withdrew to his home while retaining his posts at the university. He dictated his memoirs. While he was well enough, his friends and colleagues visited for camaraderie and instruction. He kept his thumb on university politics, struggling with President Smith over appointments, including that of his own successor. Innis had always been a magpie who collected quotations which served the *mot juste*. No doubt Innis was reflecting over his own career when, in 1951, he added this quote by Robert Louis Stevenson to his Idea File. "If a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him."[82] By this judgment Innis had been doubly blessed, for not only did he love his work but also his personal success was undeniable. However, his cancer spread quickly. He hung on long enough to mark his 58th birthday on November 5, 1952, and it may be incidental but worthy to note that he managed to avoid another "impossible" Remembrance Day, passing away beforehand on November 8.

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[82] Innis, *Idea File*, page 150, number 34.

CONCLUSION

The social scientist in Canada must have a sense of humour.

Harold Innis, 1946
The Idea File

Innis looked to the past to explain the present. Despite his use of the study of history as his primary tool of investigation, Innis regarded himself as a "social scientist." He made abundant references to social scientists and it was clear that he numbered himself among their ranks. Why would Innis consider himself a social scientist rather than an historian, when he so obviously employed the study of history to arrive at his conclusions?

Social science was born when the great success and methodological example of the natural sciences brushed up against the study of man. Political economy was a large basket from which various aspects of human behaviour were studied. The scientific method began to be applied to aspects of social phenomenon. Mathematical sciences, especially statistics, were seen as revealing of human behaviour. New specialty disciplines were formed to study the various aspects of man and these disciplines distinguished themselves by employing "scientific" methodologies. Anthropology used measurement and observation. Sociology used statistics. Economists embraced mathematical modeling. Even though tools and attitudes were borrowed from science, it seemed apparent to the practitioners themselves that the 'scientific' study of human cultural behaviour had to be distinguished from science proper, hence the caveat 'social.' Social sciences employed the methodological study of human activities. Economists, sociologists and anthropologists all assumed that they would be able to generalize principles from the phenomenon they studied. This 'nomothetic' approach was shared by natural scientists as the scientific method.[1] At that time, historians, who were also clearly studying man, generally had a different tendency and believed that the historic phenomena they described were entirely unique events specific to time and place. This attitude towards the past has been referred to as 'idiographic.' For idiographic historians, the attempt to synthesize laws or principles from the evidence of the past was a type of speculation which, by definition, must fall out of the proper bounds of historical writing. They dismissed 'laws of history' and other kinds of determinism and looked into each event as unique. However, generalizing laws from data was the first principle in science and so historical explanation by its very nature was ill suited to adopt science-like methodologies. Aside from the shared goal of truthful reporting, the techniques of science seem incidental to historical technique, and the study of history remains much as it began, a descriptive and narrative art which aspires to tell truthful stories about people in their time.

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[1] Peter Gaye, *Style in History* (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books Canada, 1988), 213. Gaye illustrates Wilhelm Windelband's use of the terms 'nomothetic' and 'idiographic.' Windelband distinguished between *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geschichte* stating that the nomothetic approach is the investigative principle found in the natural sciences whereas the study of history should properly follow an idiographic approach.

Harold Innis was a social scientist and not a historian because he travelled into the past with a theoretical agenda. Rather than studying the past for its own sake, Innis's assumption was that studying processes of the past would release knowledge of how those processes worked in the present. Historical recovery was Innis's method and technique, but his goals were to create theoretical models which could explain the patterns of civilization. Innis created social models which demonstrated a limited predictive capacity based on the precedent of similar past behaviors. If, in the past, the transition from one staple good to another consistently lead to economic storms then we can reasonably expect that sharp changes in our current staples will lead to turbulence. If in the past, the transition from one form of media to another created the obsolescence of old power elites and the creation of new elites by their association with the new media technology, then we may have arrived at an explanation for the explosive rise of Bill Gates to vast power, wealth and monopoly of knowledge.

We may reconstruct Innis's theory of history by examining the kinds of questions he asked. According to R. G. Collingwood, writers "always write for their contemporaries," and so are trying to provide answers to the current issues which are at question.[2] Collingwood advises that by looking at the answers which are offered, we may reconstruct the original problem the writer was trying to solve. In his study of communications, Innis would systematically examine a civilization throughout its trajectory. Whenever the dominant technology of communication changed, Innis would compare the relative fortune of people associated with either the ascendant or the marginalized medium. Innis would ask what are the predominate features of the medium, and how does its material nature influence the kind of messages which can be carried? How is a medium biased? Innis's questions were implied in pairs of polar opposites. Was it: light/heavy? durable/fragile? fast/slow? elite/vernacular? portable/not portable? enduring/not enduring? centralizing/decentralizing? hierarchical/not hierarchical? time oriented/space oriented? Innis inquired how the medium was associated with the civilization. Harold Adams Innis was in the habit of asking large questions. When he asked on what principle was Canada organized — the answer he detailed was an economy organized by the production and transportation of staples goods. When he asked on what principle civilization was organized — the answer he offered was based on the changing technologies of communication systems.

As we may witness in the trail of his publications, Innis's interests changed over time. As the circumstances of his life changed, his interests followed suit. However, his central motivation, which was his passionate devotion to scholarship and the institution of the university, remained constant. It is tempting to suppose that the university became his church and scholarship assumed his faith. Innis had found refuge from the tumult of modernity in the university tradition and he thought it critical to protect this tradition because it carried key values. This is why he bitterly attacked Frank Underhill for enmeshing the university in worldly politics. This is why he sprang to the defense of Underhill and others when worldly politics followed them back into the university. Innis called out that the university ought to keep its distance from the politics of the state and other powerful institutions such as business or even the church. He particularly feared that politicians and businessmen, with their dominant short term agendas, would invade the university and distort the natural paths of scholarship. Innis believed that university was an institution ideally suited by its roots in time and in the oral tradition, to provide a counterbalance to the flood of mechanized communication which promoted an overriding concern for the immediate. When Innis referred to "the cruelty of mechanized communication" he was contemplating the imbalance of power between the sender and the recipient. Mechanized communication amplified the power of elite forces over the individual. People couldn't talk back to the media and for Innis this was a critical distinction.[3] Unlike in the mass markets of business and politics, dialogue occupied an important role in the university tradition. Dialogue as the exchange of ideas between human beings, face to face, provides an equality of position for participants which is otherwise overridden by mass instruments of radio and newspapers. Mass media cannot be interrogated, whereas an individual, in dialogue, can.

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[2] R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39.

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[3] Innis, *Idea File*, pages 59-60, number 205.

Innis's first strength was to be an exhaustive researcher and, as he matured as a scholar, he added new tools and concepts to his kit. He began as an economist, as someone who watches patterns in the traffic of wealth. He understood that wealth was based in the natural resources found in geography and the ability to move those goods through geography to markets. He saw that river topography acted to centralize communication systems as it limited channels of exchange. He saw that the ocean off the Grand Banks had an opposite effect which promoted decentralization. He saw that railways were a technology which, by their ability to override nature, had changed trade patterns. He saw that the original Canadian economy was founded on natural resources which he referred to as staple goods. He saw in the Canadian example, that primary raw materials of an economy had a boom and bust cycle. He saw that the selection of staple goods was limited by the carrying capacity of the transportation system. Staple goods and their transportation systems were inextricably linked. Innis perceived a pattern of succession in which fish were succeeded by fur, fur was succeeded by timber, timber was succeeded by wheat. Railroads succeeded the water routes and wheat was succeeded by minerals and pulp and paper. Operations in mining, and especially pulp and paper, required electric power grids. The east-west orientation, previously linked to Europe and brought about by the fur trade and the Canadian river systems, was replaced by the southward draw of the great American market. After his exhaustive research into primary goods, Innis did not move on to investigate the goods of secondary industries as might have been expected.

Innis's character seems intellectually tough and righteous. He was hard-working, tenacious, and disciplined. He demonstrated the courage to go it alone if necessary. He was moralistic and rigidly-principled. He had a deep streak of melancholy. He was curious. He was emotionally distant. He had a fierce anger. He was obsessive and carried a grudge. He was cynical. He was very bright. He was an affable, energetic networker. He was deeply suspicious of power but he joined it at every opportunity. He could be contradictory. He believed that he earned his place of leadership. He believed that it was his job to create conceptual portraits of the processes of history. He believed that it was his duty to safeguard the university, his country and his civilization. Fundamentally Harold Innis was a very serious man.

Innis's shift to "communications" is fascinating. He took his economist's eye, practiced on viewing the history of raw material goods, and applied that eye to culture. Innis had found a passage between the study of systems based on the circulation of staple goods and the study of material systems which carried culture. He became an economic anthropologist of media systems. Innis found his window into media systems through the staple of pulp and paper. It was the last staple mentioned for examination in the research programme he spelled out in *The Fur Trade*. In his research, Innis discovered that the economy of pulp and paper had unique dimensions. The market for sulphite newsprint was so demanding that pulp and paper towns sprang into existence in the Canadian Shield. Innis, in his method, followed the demand market for newsprint and he arrived at the industry of the American big city newspaper. With the completion of his research programme in staples, he began looking for the next big project. He became intrigued when he looked at the economy of newspapers as a part of his staple research. He saw that newspapers had a vast amount of political power and that their economy rested on advertising. With the obvious, ineluctable approach of war in Europe, the priority of Innis's interests changed. He changed the goal of his research programme. In the past, his interest was that of trying to describe a particular economic system for the pure benefit of economic knowledge. His motives became more immediate and personal when he turned his attention to the disturbing problems of his times. Following the logical trail of his last staple gave Innis the opportunity to become more engaged with his times, and the deeper he descended into the past the more he had to say about the present. Ironically Innis became present-minded in his search to find the tools which would thwart the pervasive influence of present-mindedness. Marshall McLuhan observed

> If one were asked to state briefly the basic change which occurred in the thought of Innis in his last decade it could be said that he shifted his attention from the trade routes of the external world to the trade-routes of the mind.[4]

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[4] Marshall McLuhan, "The Later Innis," *Queen's Quarterly* 60 Autumn 1953, 395.

At their intersection, from following the traffic of natural resources, Harold Innis stepped through the looking glass, to follow the traffic of ideas.

When Harold Innis began his examination of culture he was a stranger in a strange land. According to Mary Quayle Innis, "He did not care much for art, music, the theatre."[5] As well, he did not care for novels, nor the movies, except for Charlie Chaplin. Innis's profound contribution to communications was to recognize the twofold character of media. Before Innis, the issues surrounding media were those of content, what messages the media was talking about. Innis demonstrated that media also had a second structural dimension, the dimension of context, the physical form the medium took. While media structures, as a class, previously had seemed invisible and not recognized in their influence, Innis, by his systematic examination of media as a carrier, made the influence of media structures overt. Just as the study of staples required the co-requisite study of transportation systems, the study of media required the linked examination of content and structure.

Innis became an intellectual historian by happenstance. While following the thread of staples into media technology he ended up in the world of ideas by the inevitability of his topic and his methods. Innis moved from material history to intellectual history by recognizing the relationship between the material world and the world of ideas. Media is the ground where the intellectual becomes physical and the physical becomes intellectual. Media history is the intersection between the history of ideas and the history of technology. Innis showed how the physical conditioned the intellectual by demonstrating how ideas were filtered, constrained, and contained by their physical means of delivery. It would appear that Innis recognized that technology had provided the tools to supersede the conditioning factors of geography. However, with this success, the tools themselves became the new environment which conditioned human thought and behaviour.

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[5] UTA Innis Papers B72-0003 /036 (08) Note in the hand of Mary Quayle Innis. n.d.

Innis found that the concepts he developed in his studies of staple goods were useful in explaining how communications systems worked. Much as the economy of Canada was a succession of staples, communications were a succession of media, from the oral, to stone, clay, papyrus, parchment, printing, newspapers, radio, and TV. Innis saw a succession in which one medium replaced another because it commanded a better market. This pattern was an analogue of his staples thesis and as he had noticed with staples, groups associated with a specific staple owed their fortune to that commodity. He found a similar phenomenon in his histories of ancient communication systems. When a specific medium was eclipsed by the adoption of a more desirable medium, those associated with the deposed medium also suffered a loss of fortune. He also applied the economic idea of monopoly to a dominant communications medium. This allowed him to perceive relationships of power associated with those who controlled the dominant medium. He noticed that the paramount information of a culture was encoded within the dominant medium of a culture. In ancient civilizations only small elites had access to this knowledge and Innis perceived these elites as having a "monopoly of knowledge." Those with the monopoly of knowledge were closely bound to those with the monopoly of force. He developed this concept of the monopoly of knowledge and applied it to his times. He examined the past to see how communications systems developed and he compared past systems to the systems of the present. He was driven by the agonizing descent into World War II and the ominous aftermath of Cold War. Harold Innis stretched his imagination through the chain of causality to find some tool to apply against the imminent suicide of Western Civilization.

He discovered that certain principles were at play in the modern environment. Newspapers and radio, the dominant media of his times, depended on an excited public to buy their product. Sensationalism sold air time and newspaper space. This bias to present the sensational "anesthetized" the public who became easily to manipulate. The application of machines to communications systems amplified the interests of a few and deprived the public of a means to talk back. Advertisers applied communications techniques to business practices and thereby created a culture of commercialism. By the power of the media, an excited public could be stampeded into war, or enticed to purchase commodities.

Innis believed that modern mass media had caused the public to lose its sense of perspective. Perspective for Innis was the sense of continuity, the sense of history. It was important to Innis that social phenomena were recognized as having both the dimensions of space and time. For Innis, modern civilization was in a state of discontinuity. It was uprooted in time. Innis believed his civilization had been overcome by "present mindedness" which meant an overriding concern with the affairs of the present and an indifference to the long-term picture. Innis believed in the power of historical research to reveal evolving patterns, and he believed historical knowledge could contribute to understanding the present, but it seemed that the present, by its modern nature, wasn't interested in messages from the past. Innis believed that the modern crises could be attended to, if the citizens of his civilization would see their place in time rather than being buffeted by the tumult of the immediate.

His prescription was weak, but he did arrive at a prescription. Institutions, such as the university, which had their roots in time and tradition, must act as sea anchors to hold some bearing against the tides of the present. In some ways he was extolling the university as a *refugia* for ways of thinking, unconcerned with the commercial market demands of the present. He deplored the incursions of the present into the university. In the university, the presentist influence was marked by an increasing specialization of discipline and the concomitant adoption of science-like trappings. His own discipline of political economy was in the throes of dissolution, led by the mathematical economists who described the modern economy and political scientists who found a market in describing current affairs. Innis fought mighty rearguard battles but he must have regretted that his views were out of touch in the gold rush towards the professionalization of new disciplines. He saw the university properly functioning as an ark for all aspects of civilization, but he also saw the university distorted by the marketplace which rewarded and punished various types of intellectual inquiry as to whether or not they were judged useful by businessmen and politicians. Innis believed that the "University [was the] centre where one has the right and the duty not to make up one's mind."[6]

Innis lamented and raged against his times because he had finally taken his mission. He believed that being a thinker could make a difference to civilization. After a lifetime of studies his mission took on an urgency. Harold Innis, who studied the implications of empire and communications through time and space, saw the drama of those implications acted out in the Canada of his dwindling years. Innis saw his duty to provide some warning in hope of staving off disaster. He developed the ability to see past the "complexity and confusion"[7] of technology so that he could look into the channels of culture and ideas. He fulfilled his personal obligation to civilization by consciously acting to break open the latest monopoly of knowledge. By deliberate use of his tools of "critical survey and report," he was laying bare the machinery of cultural change for anyone who would care to examine it, and his findings were an apocalyptic incitement of technoscience.

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[6] Innis, *Idea File*, 41, number 105.

[7] Innis, "A Critical Review," *The Bias of Communication*, 190.

> The conditions of freedom and thought are being destroyed by science, technology, and the mechanization of knowledge, and with them, Western civilization.[8]

Evidently, the world had taught Harold Innis more dread than hope. It seemed to him that he had the curse of Cassandra, condemned to see the future and unable to do anything about it.[9] He had great difficulty in explaining his new concepts and, with the exception of a sympathetic few, he left his community perplexed. In spite of that, he continued to write and publish and he wrote until the last. It seems evident in his writing, by his politicking, and in the institutions he helped create, that Harold Innis was a man who was consciously wrestling with the direction of his times. He behaved as if his thinking could make a difference.

Like his Upper Canadian forbears Harold Innis was a pioneer who's impulse was to break new ground. With the benefit of an education at Chicago he learned to see the social impact of technology. His study of natural resources in conjunction with transportation systems taught him to see empire as a pattern of flow. With his staples research programme exhausted, morally driven by the issues of war and peace, and concerned by the social power of publishing, he followed Canadian newsprint into the marketplace of the big American newspaper. From there Innis investigated publishing technologies back to their origins in time with an eye to their social influence. Conceptually and methodologically, Innis's inquiry into communications media was a close replication of the systematic historical method he employed to study staple economies. Harold Innis followed staples into communications where he came to recognize that — whether by the example of beaver pelts or by the example of advertising — he had always been studying the flow of media through empire and civilization.

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[8] Innis, "A Critical Review," *The Bias of Communication*, 190.

[9] Innis, "The Church in Canada," *Essays*, 383.

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APPENDIX

A Chronology of Major and Selected Works as Published by Harold Adams Innis During his Lifetime[1]

1918 "The Returned Soldier,"
MA thesis, McMaster University, 1918.

1920 "A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway,"
Doctoral Thesis, University of Chicago, 1920;
also *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*, Innis, (Toronto) 1923.

1927 Review: M. I. Newbigin, *Canada, The Great River, the Lands and the Men*, *American Historical Review*, 1927.

1929 "The Teaching of Economic History in Canada," ^{E}
paper presented National Conference of Canadian Universities, Ottawa, May 22-23, 1929;
also *Contributions to Canadian Economics*, 1929.

1929 "The Work of Thorstein Veblen" ^{E}
Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly, 1929.

1929 *Select Documents in Canadian Economic History*, vol. 1,
Innis & A.R.M. Lower, eds. (Toronto) 1929.

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[1] For extensive bibliographies of H. A. Innis see: Jane Ward, "The Published Works of H. A. Innis," *Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, 19 (1953), 233—44; and Robin Neill, *A New Theory of Value: The Canadian Economics of H. A. Innis*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 126—141. To facilitate locating articles I have also indicated which articles may be found in the two posthumous collections which are easily available. Articles which may be found in *Essays in Canadian Economic History*, Mary Quayle Innis, ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), have been signified by a superscript E.^{E} Articles which may be found in *Staples, Markets and Cultural Change*, Daniel Drache, ed., (Montreal, 1995), have been signified by a superscript S.^{S} Articles common to both are signified by superscript E,S. $^{E\,S}$ Please be aware that Drache has taken it upon himself to change the names of several of Innis's articles.

1930 *The Fur Trade in Canada: an Introduction to Canadian Economic History,*
Innis, (New Haven) 1930.

1930 *Peter Pond: Fur Trader and Adventurer,*
Innis, (Toronto) 1930.

1931 "Transportation As a Factor In Canadian Economic History," E, S
Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association, 1931;
also *Problems of Staple Production in Canada,* (Toronto) 1933.

1931 "An Introduction to the Economic History of the Maritimes, Including Newfoundland and New England," E
Canadian Historical Association Report, 1931.

1931 "The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Fishery in Newfoundland," E
Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 1931.

1933 "Government Ownership and the Canadian Scene," E
Canadian Problems As Seen by Twenty Outstanding Men of Canada,
(Toronto) 1933.

1933 "Interrelations between the Fur Trade of Canada and the United States," E
Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 1933.

1934 "The Canadian Economy in the Depression,"
The Canadian Economy and its Problems, (Toronto) 1934. E, S

1934 "Economic Nationalism," S
Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association, 1934.

1935 "The Role of Intelligence: Some Further Notes," S
Canadian Journal of Political Science, 1935.

1935 "Discussion in the Social Sciences," S
paper presented at University of British Columbia, 1935;
also *Dalhousie Review,* 1936.

1936 "For the People," S
University of Toronto Quarterly, 1936.

1936 "Unused Capacity as a Factor in Canadian Economic History,"[E,S]
Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 1936;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State*, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1936 "Canadian Frontiers of Settlement,"
Settlement and the Mining Frontier, (Toronto) 1936.

1937 "Labour in Canadian Economic History,"[E,S]
Labor in Canadian-American Relations, (Toronto) 1937.

1937 "The Historical Development of the Dairy Industry in Canada,"[E]
The Dairy Industry in Canada, (Toronto) 1937.

1937 "Significant Factors in Canadian Economic Development,"[E,S]
paper presented to the British Association of the Advancement of Science, Knottingham, Sept. 11, 1937;
also *Canadian Historic Review*, 1937.

1938 "The Penetrative Powers of the Price System,"[E,S]
Presidential Address to the Canadian Political Science Association, 1938;
also *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 1938;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State*, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1938 "Transportation in the Canadian Economy,"[E]
A History of Transportation in Canada, (Toronto) 1938.

1938 "Economic Trends in Canadian-American Relations,"[E,S]
an address to the Conference on Educational Problems in Canadian-American Relations, University of Maine, June 21-3, 1938.

1938 "The Lumber Trade in Canada,"[E]
The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest, (Toronto), 1938.

1938 "The Passing of Political Economy,"[S]
Commerce Journal, 1938.

1939 "The Wheat Economy,"[E]
The Wheat Economy, (Toronto), 1939.

1940 *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy*,
Innis, (Toronto) 1940.

1940 *The Diary of Alexander James McFail,*
Innis, (Toronto) 1940.

1940 "The Changing Structure of the Canadian Market,"[E]
Marketing Organization and Technique, 1940.

1940 "The Rowell-Sirois Report,"[S]
Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 1940.

1941 "Recent Developments in the Canadian Economy,"[E]
Canada in Peace and War, (Toronto) 1941.

1941 "The Canadian Mining Industry,"[E]
American Influence in Canadian Mining, (Toronto) 1941.

1942 "Newspaper in Economic Development,"
Journal of Economic History, 1942;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1942 "Imperfect Regional Competition and Political Institutions on the North Atlantic Seaboard,"[E]
Commerce Journal, 1942;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1943 "Liquidity Preference as a Factor in Industrial Development,"[E,S]
Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 1943;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1943 "Decentralization and Democracy,"[E,S]
Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 1943;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1944 "A Plea for the University Tradition,"
a convocation address to Dalhousie University, 1944;
also *Dalhousie Review,* 1944;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1944 "Political Economy in the Modern State,"
Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 1944;
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1945 "The English Publishing Trade in the Nineteenth Century: An Economic Approach,"
Manitoba Arts Review, 1945.

1945 "The English Press in the Nineteenth Century: An Economic Approach,"
University of Toronto Quarterly, 1945.

1946 *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "The Political Implications of Unused Capacity," E,S
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "On the Economic Significance of Cultural Factors," S
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "An Economic Approach to English Literature in the Nineteenth Century,"
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "The Problems of Rehabilitation,"
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "The University in the Modern Crisis,"
a convocation address to [university?] during wartime [date?].
also *Political Economy in the Modern State,* Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "Imperfect Regional Competition and the Political Institutions on the North Atlantic Seaboard," E
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "Transportation and the Tariff,"
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1946 "Reflections on Russia,"
Political Economy in the Modern State, Innis, (Toronto) 1946.

1947 *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Adult Education,* Manitoba, 1947.

1947 "The Church in Canada," E,S
In Time of Healing. Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada, 1947.

1947 "Minerva's Owl,"
Presidential Address to the Royal Society of Canada, 1947;
also *The Bias of Communication,* Innis, (Toronto) 1951.

1948 "Empire and Communications: "
"Introduction,"
"Egypt,"
"Babylonia,"
"The Oral Tradition and Greek Civilization,"
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"Parchment and Paper,"
"Paper and the Printing Press,"
The Beit Lectures, Oxford, 1948;
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1948 "Great Britain, The United States and Canada,"[E,S]
Cust Foundation Lecture, University of Nottingham, May 21, 1948;
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1948 "A Critical Review,"[S]
paper presented at the Conference of Commonwealth Universities,
Oxford, July 23, 1948;
also revised in *The Bias of Communication,* Innis, (Toronto) 1951.

1949 "The Press, a Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth
Century,"
the Stamp Memorial Lectures, University of London, 1949;
also *Changing Concepts of Time,* Innis, (Toronto) 1952.

1949 "The Bias of Communication,"[S]
paper presented at the University of Michigan, April 18, 1949;
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1949 "Technology and Public Opinion in The United States,"
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1950 "A Plea for Time,"[S]
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1950 "Industrialism and Cultural Values,"[S]
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The Bias of Communication, Innis, (Toronto) 1951.

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The Harold Innis Foundation, 1981
postwar trip to Russia (1945)

1980 *The Idea File of Harold Adams Innis,* William Christian, ed.,
University of Toronto Press, 1980
conceptual tools (1944-1952)

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1956 *Essays in Canadian Economic History* , Mary Quayle Innis, ed.,
University of Toronto Press, 1980
collected economic papers (1929-1948)

1995 *Staples, Markets and Cultural Change,* Daniel Drache, ed.,
McGill-Queen's Press, 1995
thematically selected essays (1930-1952)